

Build your own: Nests for woodducks, mallards, bluebirds, and bats
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Build it, and they will come. Some species of wildlife have proven that they will take up temporary occupancy if you follow their rules of habitat. Among those species are bluebirds, bats, wood ducks, mallards, and Canada geese.

There are very specific rules to follow in both building and placing artificial nests, if you want to be successful over time in attracting specific birds. Wildlife agencies offer free plans on the Internet, as well, and there are books with detailed plans and instructions on location of specific nests. Of course, the nesting structures can also be purchased. The world wide web has a wealth of helpful information on nesting structures: you can quickly get very good information from an Internet search with key words such as “bluebird boxes”, “mallard nests”, or “bat houses”.

Although birds may have particular needs, they aren't fussy about the box being mathematically perfect. Appearance is not usually their main concern. What they do need is a nesting site that is safe, weatherproof, high enough and in an area where predators won't be able to get to them easily. If there is no natural shelter around, it is best to place the box facing south-east to north, to avoid strong direct sunlight and the heaviest rain. The box can be tilted forward a bit so that the rainwater will run off of it. To discourage predators, the box can be placed near a thorny bush or chicken-wire can be installed around the entrance area as long as it does not obstruct the bird's comings and goings. If squirrels want to make the box their home, a metal plate around the entrance hole can deter them from enlarging it and getting in.

It's a good idea to clean the box at the end of the breeding season. This is not difficult and should be done by removing the old nesting materials inside and then use boiling water to cleanse it. This will kill any parasites that may be present. It is important not to use insecticides because it may harm the bird when it returns; boiling water is sufficient.

Bird nesting boxes can also be used by many species in the winter months. Instead of taking the box down, leave it up so that our feathered friends can have a warm place to rest up in the colder months.

Here are some great tips for putting up bird boxes from the United States Geological Survey Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center:

- 1. Know where you'll put the nest.** Read about other biological needs of your intended species, such as food and cover needs of young. For instance, the mallard hen and ducklings leave the nest together within 12 hours of hatching to look for nearby wetlands with emergent plants for cover and aquatic insects to eat.
- 2. Follow specific construction plans.** Size of box, materials, size of the opening and other details are critical. For instance, if the precise opening isn't used, competitor birds will likely be more of a problem.
- 3. Think about aesthetics.** Curved shapes and earth tones blend into the outdoors better than sharp angles and glossy paint.
- 4. Plan now for maintenance.** Lack of maintenance is the number one cause of failure for most nest structures. For instance, waterfowl don't carry nest material to their sites, so you have to do that for them.
- 5. Have some patience.** Don't get discouraged if your nest isn't used immediately. Where birds aren't used to nest structures, it could be several years before they try them. Once they do, they and their offspring are likely to return year after year.

Did you know....

The decline of the Pileated woodpecker almost led to the extinction of the wood duck from North

America. Why? Wood ducks use the woodpecker's holes in trees for nests. Man made nest boxes have more recently come to the rescue.