

News on Nestboxes

continued

before approaching, or to sit and wait as the other parent delivers food. Above all, don't forget to place it where you and your family can enjoy watching the birds you're providing a home for!

MEETING BIRDS' OTHER NEEDS

Birds will be more attracted to your yard (and therefore your nest boxes), if they are able to meet most of their habitat needs there. Water is one element that is commonly overlooked, and can be easily provided with a bird bath or water garden. Food can be made available in the form of suet, bird

seed, and seed- and fruit-bearing shrubs and trees. You can even provide nesting material for your potential tenants, by hanging bits of hair, string, feathers, and cellophane in a string bag in an obvious location in your yard.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING!

Your nest box can be left up year round, but should be in place by the time birds are establishing territories and selecting nest sites.

For many migrant species, this occurs in May and June, so having your nest box up by early spring

should allow plenty of time. Species that live here year round, such as chickadees and nuthatches, begin selecting their nest sites in March or April, so it is often necessary to have boxes for these birds in place by the end of winter.

While you're still basking in the glow of watching your first batch of nestlings leave home... Get out your bucket and start cleaning! It's important to prepare your nest box for the next breeding season. Dispose of the nest, wash the interior thoroughly with water, and spray with

a 1% rotenone powder or pyrethrin-based insecticide.

Spring is nearly here and what better way to get in the mood than by building a nest box of your own? Happy building and good luck attracting birds to your yard this year!

SUGGESTED READING

Stokes, D. and L. Stokes. 1990. *The Complete Birdhouse Book: The Easy Guide to Attracting Nestin Birds*. Little, Brown and Co.. Toronto.

Kalmbach, E. and W. McAtee. 1979. *Homes for Birds*. Conservation Bulletin 14, U.S. Dept. of the Interior.

Cortright, S. and W. Pokriots. 1996. *Making Backyard Birdhouses: Attracting, Feeding an Favourite Birds*. Sterling Publishing Co., New York.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

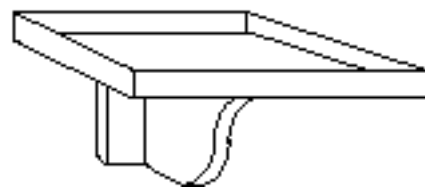
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PLATFORM NESTERS

There are a number of common urban birds that can be found nesting on shelflike projections of buildings. You can often attract these birds to your yard by attaching a small platform to the side of a building or garage. Species that build their nests on platforms include American robin, Eastern phoebe, and Barn swallow.



ROBIN PLATFORM

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News on Nestboxes

Suzanne Thornton

One of the truly great things about Winnipeg is the variety of bird species you can find right in the city. Robins, blue jays, house wrens, chickadees, nuthatches, and woodpeckers all call the elms and residential gardens of Winnipeg home. Even more exciting is that many of these urban birds are cavity-nesters and will respond readily to nest boxes. Putting up these avian abodes in our yards gives all of us the opportunity to view nature at work. How exciting for adults and kids alike to build a nest box and eventually watch the story that unfolds!

IMPORTANCE OF NEST BOXES

Providing nest boxes is becoming critical to the survival of many cavity-nesters, due to the decrease in availability of dead trees and branches where these birds make their homes. Recent research suggests that some species benefit tremendously from these artificial nest sites, laying bigger clutches, hatching more eggs, and fledging more young than in tree cavities.

ATTRACTING BIRDS: WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

Most suburban yards with a good mix of trees, shrubs and lawn can attract a large variety of birds. When thinking of the birds you would like to have nesting in your yard, remember that only cavity-nesting species will use nest boxes.

There are two types of cavity-nesters. Primary nesters excavate their own holes and customize cavities to meet their specific needs. Most of these species, including many woodpeckers, will rarely nest in nest boxes. One exception to this in the Northern Flicker.

Secondary nesters do not drill their own holes, but use those created by primary nesters. In nature, these "squatters" take what they can get in terms of entrance hole and cavity dimensions, and so tend to be less



picky about these things when selecting nest boxes. Wrens, swallows, and bluebirds are all secondary nesters. Nuthatches and chickadees will excavate their own cavities if wood is soft enough, but will also use those made by other birds.

HOW TO BUILD A NEST BOX

If you decide to construct your own nest box, there are a few things to keep in mind.

Wood is the most common construction material for nest boxes and usually the best, since its insulating quality protects birds and eggs from temperature extremes. Little is known about how birds respond to brightly coloured nestboxes, so if you choose to paint yours, muted tones are recommended. Some birds such as

Black-capped chickadees are known to prefer more rustic, natural-looking houses. Never paint or otherwise treat the interior of your nest box, and remember that lead-based paint, creosote, and pressure-treated lumber are all harmful to birds.

In terms of its dimensions, the nest box should be big enough to accommodate the nest, but not so big that it is difficult for birds to fill with nesting material. It must be deep enough to allow 3 to 4 inches of room above the nest, keeping eggs and nestlings out of reach of predators.

The size of the entrance hole is specific to the species you wish to attract, and must be large enough to allow your bird easy access. If you wish to try your luck with a single bird house, a 1 1/2" diameter entrance hole will accommodate the greatest variety of birds (see our plans for a Super Easy Birdhouse).

People generally wish to exclude European starlings from their nest boxes and entrance hole diameter can be used to prevent access by these birds. A hole size smaller than 1 9/16" excludes starlings, but will still accommodate many other desirable species. Unfortunately, it is much more difficult to exclude

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house sparrows from nest boxes, since the required size of < 1 1/8" is too small to allow entry to other species.

There are several other features you will want to include in your nest box design:

- *Ventilation holes* 1/4" in diameter drilled in the front panel between the roof and the entrance hole allow air circulation.
- *Drainage holes* 3/4" in diameter in the floor of the nest box encourage any moisture that finds its way into the box to drain.
- A *detachable top or side* will allow for easy cleaning of the box.

- *Grooves or 1/2" wire mesh* on the inside of the box immediately below the entrance hole make it easier for nestlings to fledge.

- A roof with a slight overhang will provide extra protection from rain and sun.

There is no need to include a perch. Birds do not need them and they may make it easier for predators to get to eggs and nestlings.

If you will be welcoming of any species that happens into your yard, see our plans for a Super Easy Birdhouse. The dimensions of this nest box will accommodate a wide variety of bird species. On the other hand, if you would prefer to

RECOMMENDED DIMENSIONS FOR BIRDHOUSES

(all dimensions are in inches)

Species	Entrance Hole Diameter	Entrance Hole Height Above Floor	Floor Dimensions	Total Height of Box
Black-capped chickadee	1 1/8-1 1/2	6-7	4 X 4 to 5 X 5	9-12
White-breasted nuthatch	1 1/8-1 1/2	6-7	4 X 4 to 5 X 5	9-12
Tree swallow	1 1/4-1 1/2	6-7	4 X 4 to 5 X 5	9-12
House wren	1-1 1/2	6-7	4 X 4 to 5 X 5	9-12
Northern flicker	2-3	10-20	6 X 6 to 8 X 8	14-24

tailor your nest box to a single species, we have included a list of dimensions specific to several of the cavity-nesters you're most likely to find in and around your yard.

LOCATION! LOCATION! LOCATION!

When thinking about where to put your nest box, remember that different species prefer different habitats, and place it where you are most likely to encounter that bird.

Your nest box should be located on a post or a tree at least six feet off the ground (most birds prefer to nest between 5 and 20 feet above ground). Position it so the hole is facing away from prevailing winds. A sunny location is preferable to a shady one. Your nest box may be more attractive if there is a nearby perch for parents to survey the box

COMMON WINNIPEG CAVITY-NESTERS AND THEIR HABITATS

- Black-capped chickadee — suburban or rural locations with a mixture of trees and open areas
- White-breasted nuthatch — suburban or rural woods, or locations with a mixture of trees and open space
- Tree swallow — open fields or open woods near water
- House wren — suburban yards, or open areas with a mixture of trees and dense shrubbery or brush piles
- Northern flicker — in or at the edge of open woods

A Super Easy Birdhouse

(from Stokes and Stokes, 1990)



The following are plans for one of the easiest birdhouses to make. All you need is a handsaw, a hammer, some nails, wood and a drill. Common pine works well for this house and you only need to buy two boards — 1 X 6 inches and 1 X 5 inches. The real dimensions of these boards are 3/4 X 5 1/2 inches and 3/4 X 4 1/2 inches.

Diagrams below show how the pieces of the birdhouse fit on the lumber, as well as placement of nails and holes for each individual piece.

SIX EASY STEPS

1. Draw the patterns on the wood for the top, bottom, front, back, and sides of the nest box.
2. Mark where nails go and holes are drilled.
3. Cut out the wood.
4. Drill the holes.
5. Drive nails partially into wood where indicated.
6. Place pieces together and finish nailing.

