



BACKYARD nature center News

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How to choose a nest box

Your birds are thinking spring! Bluebirds, chickadees, titmice, nuthatch, and all the woodpeckers are looking for a cozy nest box, a home out of the weather.

Getting a jump on the season, and possibly producing up to three broods of young each year, these feathered friends are the first to start the



nesting season. Poor dear cardinals, robins, blue jays, doves and thrashers have to wait until the weather is nice enough to build open cup nests in dense trees or shrubs.

What's your style? Fancy or rustic, mid-Danish modern, rustic contemporary? Whatever your style, there are a few very important things to consider when selecting a nest box and they are in order of importance:

a. Clean out. The ability to clean out a house after each brood is critical. All young birds will have mites. Creepy crawly mites can live in the nest



material and could infect the second brood of

young. Simply having access to the cavity by opening a small door or sliding the bottom aside to pull out that old soggy, crawly material full

of skin, fecal material and egg parts is a healthier way for incoming young.

Hint: use gloves!

b. Opening diameter. Most birds who will use a box can and will use a box with an entry hole of over 1.25" to 1.5". Anything smaller, say

quarter size or 1" is accessible only by the tiny house wren (not the Carolina Wren). Floor space is also important. Try to select a fairly nice floor dimension, say 4"x 4" and the deeper, the better. Let the birds fill it as nice and full as they like.

c. Predator guard on front: An extended opening on the front of a house creates a kind of tunnel. That tunnel makes it very difficult for predatory



Protect your nest box with a predator guard.

animals like racoons to reach the young with their short little forearms and wreak havoc. If the house does not come with one, they are available to easily install on the front of the entrance.

d. Ease of installation, or placement, of a house. Whether you hang the box from a structure or place it on a pole, most birds are happy with quite a wide variance or height, say 4 to 6 feet. Gently swinging or softly swaying is alright, just not twirling around and around on a wire or chord. We don't want to make them dizzy.

e. After selecting and installing your birdhouse, don't be a stranger to it. It's an old wives' tale that if you mess with or touch a bird, their house, or their young, they will abandon. Birds have a very poor sense of smell and great parenting instincts. Checking for the start of a wasp nest in the house is important. Some wasps are sneaky and get in there very quickly and start building. Apply a heavy coat of Vaseline to the inside top of the box and the wasps will not be successful.



GREAT NEW PRODUCTS FOR SPRING

- Some of you may have noticed at the holidays, the wooden postcards near the checkout. They are so much fun that we sold out. New ones are in and they are definitely a hoot!



They require just two stamps to mail to a special friend or loved one and the post office handles them by hand instead of running them through a machine and mangling them! Some are beautiful watercolor reproductions and some are so funny that they are definitely worth checking out!

- Mealworm suet blocks are new this spring. They are packed with the flash dried mealworms. Yum! They come in the small cakes and the big 3# blocks. We're anxious to see if the adults feed them to their young. We know that the insectivores will love them. Conduct your own little science expose'

- Burlap applique garden flags are in for spring! Update your winter look with a touch of color with a new bright look!



Go for all the color spring has to offer

Goldfinch are just beginning to molt their drab winter feathers. When in the sunlight, the new bright feathers of the male goldfinch are evident. Dressing for the occasion, all male birds look their best for courtship, and it has just begun! By mid-March, male bluebirds, goldfinch and house finch have nearly replaced all winter's drab look and are already on point



for spring's romantic activities. There is nothing more charming than witnessing a male feeding a female or sitting on top of a nest box looking irresistible, like Cary Grant, and singing his heart out. Is it any wonder, why we watch birds? It calms us, it reassures us, it heightens our sense of wonder and awe. It's simple, doesn't require a .com, it's rooted in the generations before us. Everybody's grandparents watched birds. Now all generations watch birds. We need the ability to connect with nature at our very core. Welcome spring. We're ready for you.



Time to assess your nectar and jelly feeder situation

Tax time is also the time folks start seeing hummingbirds and even some orioles. Are your feeders in good condition? Does your old hummingbird feeder drip too much and needs replaced? Jelly feeder need a new bowl? Let me know if you want grandma Clausen's favorite jelly recipe and we'll print it for you right at the checkout. The most important thing to remember about the jelly, is to select one that has no fructose corn syrup. It is very bad for the birds. Late last summer hummingbirds were lapping up jelly when the orioles weren't dominating the feeders. After the last oriole had left in the fall, there was a new visitor to the jelly. I should say "visitors"! I looked out the kitchen window, the copper heart shaped feeder with the little glass bowl was totally un-recognizable. What had taken over my fresh jelly? It was my neighbors honey bees! I called my neighbor, a block away, and said "your bees are down here", as if I expected him to come retrieve them! He said, well let them eat till it's all gone and they'll come home. I was dumbfounded, but completely excited about the new takers of my jelly. For the next week, I treated the honey bees in hopes that it would help them prepare for a very cold winter! Isn't nature amazing!





It's Purple Martin Time!

Hard to believe, I know, but it's almost here. Time to get our houses in top notch condition. Keep those doors closed and don't get anxious. Last year, our martins showed up around the 15th of March. Timing is precarious at best, arriving that early. The birds risk snow and freezing temps, and worse, no flying insects! That's the scary part of this endeavor. All it takes are three days of no insect activity and that's it for these early birds. This is where meal worms come in as a safety net. Some of you may have heard the story of our friend Bruce who, just for fun, with his two young boys beside him, began catapulting live mealworms past the front porches of his martin house. Much to their surprise, the birds took notice. Knowing that the purple martin diet consists of exclusively "flying" insects, he thought, what the heck, it can't hurt! Miraculously, it worked!



Now, I'm not suggesting that we all get going with the sling shot. I wouldn't be a good shot, probably Nick either, but placing the wigglers in a small cup inside the compartments, just may save a life during frigid temps. We've had much success with this in the past 6 years in the 20-compartment house in the parking lot in front of the store. The martins couldn't resist, even though they were not flying and probably not wiggling for long.

Get your house up now. The first scouts will be returning from their winter homes in South and Central America sooner than you think. Migration begins as early as late January in Florida and the birds move north even up to Canada for nesting. Adult martins who nested the year before in a house have established a site fidelity to that house and will return there each year. If you are putting up a new house, don't get in a hurry to open it. You will not likely attract adult birds, but rather, you will attract the yearlings, also called sub-adults, beginners who have never nested before and come four to six weeks after the older adult martins. It's really fun to watch the arrival progress on the Purple Martin Conservation Association website (pmca.org). Landlords report first sightings in the area and they are tracked by PMCA and logged as adults and sub-adults. You can pretty much calculate your birds' arrival date by it, look out the window, and there they are! Attracting martins takes a bit of effort and care. Colonies start off slowly with only one or two pairs of nesting birds. Soon, you too can be part of the infected; landlords who have PMS, that's purple martin syndrome!



A good way to start the new year with a "toast"!

It's still grey outside. Songbirds have only begun to sing. Not quite time to plant the garden. Oh wow...I sound down. Well, I'm not! I have two of the finest employees anyone could ever ask for. Their eagerness to learn about birds and their own personal connection to natural world—they inspire me! Each brings special gifts to the BACKYARD Nature Center. Both are wonderful at recycling and they keep me from becoming lazy. Both ladies are health nuts and know how to eat right, (makes me a better lunch packer). Coming from prestigious professional backgrounds, they handle any situation that may arise with ease, confidence and grace. It makes it easy for Nick and I to feel good about leaving the store in such good hands. We aren't getting any younger and after 25 years, we worry about becoming complacent in our work. Being around these high-energy gals brings renewed life to our outlook and reminds us of how we fell in love with birdwatching and this little store.

Wow, did I mention they are both "runners"? A New Year "TOAST" to Mary and Tammy! We are grateful for you!

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WWW.BACKYARDNATURECENTER.COM

Remember to Recycle



February SEED SALE!



Best quality at the best price!

Now through February 28



Birds eating you out of house and home? Consider this: natural seed is at its lowest point of the year. Songbirds have been working all winter on what was naturally produced in the fall. Temps are still bitter; some cavity nesters are looking for nest sites in out of the cold. Increased energy levels are requiring more visits to the table. Make sure your table is full!

EARLY BIRD SEED accounts can be added to or opened, with a minimum of \$150. Early Bird accounts enjoy a lovely **20%** discount on all seed, suet, nuts, and mealworms in any size bag! Or.... You can simply purchase 20- to 50-lb. bags at **20% off** and take them with you at that time. Either way, your birdies will be grateful!

