



BACKYARD nature center News

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How to choose a nest box

Your birds are thinking spring! Blue birds, 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. Poordear cardinals, robins, bluejays, doves and thrashers have to wait until the weather is nice enough to build open cupnests 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. Cleanout. 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 housewren (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 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 orchard. We don't want to make them dizzy.

e. After selecting and installing your bird house, 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.



Can I Attract Purple Martins?



Male Purple Martin

John James Audubon once remarked as he traveled that “almost every country tavern has a martin box on the upper part of its signboard; and I have observed the handsomer the box, the better does the inn generally prove to be.” Before Audubon and the advent of the country tavern, Native Americans were also known to entice Purple Martins. They used hollowed-out gourds and hung them high in their villages.

Because of this long association with man, martins on the east coast now only nest in man made structures.

So why have these birds been so sought after for so many years? Well, first off, they are wonderful to watch. Since they are members of the swallow family, their flight is both graceful and exciting. They nest in colonies which means we get to observe their fascinating social behavior. Oh... and they also eat tons of bugs!

Can you become a martin landlord? Well, let's take a minute and think this one through. Since martins are swallows they feed on the wing. This means they must have unobstructed air space for foraging. Do you live in a place with some open land? If you have water nearby that is a plus as well.

If you think you have the right habitat (and come in and talk to us about your yard, we can help you decide) then you can pick a house. Typical martin houses will have between 8 and 24 compartments. The houses need to have adequate ventilation and they need to be easy to clean. For most birds, we would not recommend metal bird houses, but for Purple Martins, white aluminum houses are super. They are lightweight, and last for

years. Once you have picked a house, you will need to pick a spot in your yard.

The martins seem to like their homes placed at least 40 feet from any buildings or trees and they like them about 15 feet in the air. (Telescoping poles really help with this.) We have found that houses placed close to humans do better than those placed farther away.

Get the houses up now. The first scouts will start returning from their winter in South America soon. The migration starts as early as late January in Florida and the birds move north even up to Canada and arrive there by April. The birds who nested the year before in a house seek that same house again. The yearlings (those hatched the year before) are the ones seeking new homes. They are usually four to six weeks behind their elders. Attracting martins takes a bit of effort and the colonies start off slowly with one or two pairs of birds nesting. But if your habitat proves to be martin friendly, your patience will be rewarded! And your summers will be blessed with these beautiful birds.



“Lost time is never found again.”

Great words of wisdom from my favorite PBS series, All Creatures Great & Small.



Mary Lake Thompson Towel Sets & Singles make the best little gift for any occasion! Beautiful designs, and finest quality fabric. Keep a couple on hand for when you need a thoughtful last-minute gift!



They're back! Beautiful and each one individually designed by nature. Granite Boulder Baths are here. These baths are guaranteed not to crack in winter and just get better with age.



Introducing the Spruce Creek Collection

We love recycled, composite feeders! Inspired by Colorado's pristine mountain wilderness, bird & squirrel feeders and bird houses. There is a 6-mile trail lush with spruce and pine, dotted by wildflowers and long-abandoned mining cabins, standing as relics of the Colorado gold-rush glory days. The Spruce Creek Trail, a favorite among birdwatchers has become the inspiration behind this new collection of durable, handsome feeders, made in the USA, that will last and last in your yard.

Spruce Creek Bluebird Nest Box



Spruce Creek Squirrel Munch Box



Spruce Creek Hanging Platform feeder





For people who feed and care for backyard birds

The Shops at Tallgrass

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STORE HOURS

Monday–Saturday: 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

Sunday: Closed

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:
WWW.BACKYARDNATURECENTER.COM



from left to right
Tammy, Trudy, Cathy & Nick

EARLY BIRD SEED SALE TIME!

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 fall. Temps are still bitter; 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 20-50lb bags of seed at **20%** and take them with you on that day.

Now thru **February 28, 2022**.

