



Advice Sheet

Homes for Birds



All birds need a safe place to lay their eggs and raise their chicks. Many like to nest in cavities, but because there are few old trees with suitable holes for nest building, there is a shortage of good nest sites, both in gardens and the wider countryside. Several species of garden birds will readily use artificial nest boxes. Putting up nest boxes is a great way to help small birds.

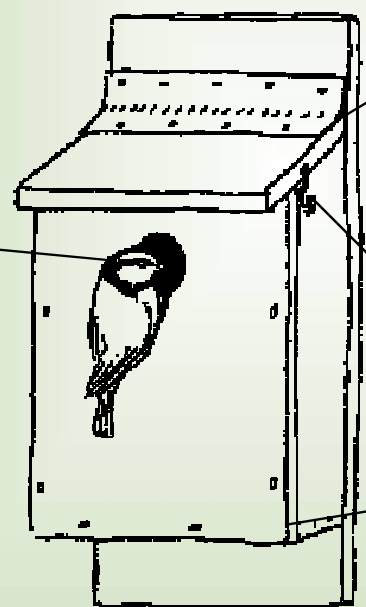
Making a nest box

It is very easy to make your own garden nest boxes. All you need is a few basic DIY skills. A plank 6" wide and 3/4" to 1" thick and some galvanised nails or screws are required.

A hole box mimics a natural hole in a rotting tree; it will be used by blue tits, great tits or sparrows. Varying the hole size determines which birds can squeeze in. A perch outside is unnecessary and should not be fitted as it may be used by a predator to gain access. If cats or other predators are a problem try attaching a ball of chicken wire around the box. The birds will still be able to get in, but not anything bigger.

Entry hole size determine which birds can use the nest box

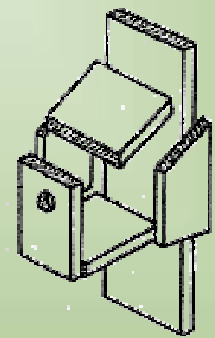
- 25mm blue tit, coal tit
- 28mm great tit
- 32mm house sparrow, tree sparrow, nuthatch



Use a strip of rubber fixed with tacks as a hinge for the roof, a piece of old tyre inner tube is fine.

Catch to secure roof

Make drainage holes in the floor



Cutting plan for hole box

You can use a water-based preservative (not creosote) on the outside, but not the inside.

The basic design can be modified to leave the front half open. Like this it may be used by robins, or possibly pied wagtails or wrens.



Where to site your Box

Boxes can be attached to trees, trellis or a wall; they should be at least 2m above ground. Don't put it too close to the bird feeder, nesting birds like a little privacy – would you want to live next door to a fast-food restaurant? The entrance should face away from the prevailing wind and rain. Don't place the box where it will be in direct sunshine, as the chicks inside will overheat on a sunny day

Hole boxes can be in a fairly exposed location; they should have a clear flight path in and out, and no branches nearby which could be used by a predator to gain access.

Open fronted boxes need to be concealed among vegetation, surrounded by branches or hidden by climbing plants is ideal.

You may wish to site at least one box where it can be observed from indoors. It is difficult to be precise about box locations, if your nest box is not used for a year, try moving it somewhere else.

Attaching the box

Nailing boxes to trees is not recommended, as it can injure the tree. A better way is to use a length of garden wire around the trunk or branch. A piece of hosepipe or old bicycle tyre will prevent the wire cutting into the bark. Remember that trees grow, so the wire may need loosening every few years.

Boxes attached to walls can be securely nailed in place.

Don't look inside the box while it is in use, you may frighten off the inhabitants. Watch and enjoy from a distance.

Cleaning out

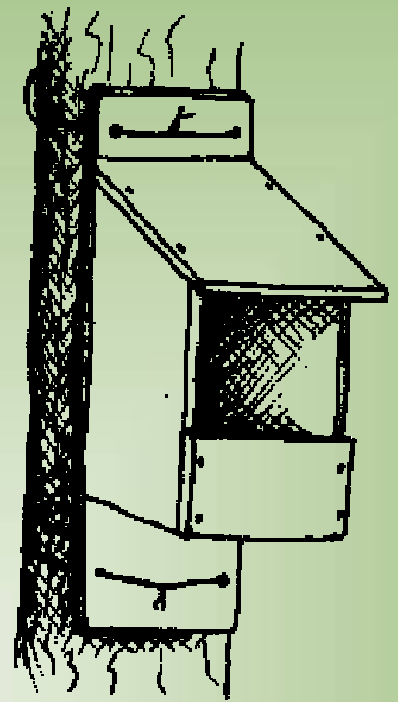
Clean out the box at the end of the season. Fleas and other parasites can lurk in the old nest, ready to move onto any new inhabitants. Most of these will be removed when you clear out the old nest material. If you wish you can sterilise the box with boiling water – don't use insecticides or disinfectants.

Leave the empty box up over winter, it may be used as a roosting site

Natural nest sites

A dense shrubbery will provide nest sites for species such as blackbirds which will not use nest boxes. If you are planning to plant some shrubs, choose hawthorn, firethorn *pyracantha*, berberis, California lilac *Ceanothus*, or Cotoneaster. Their thorny branches make good nesting cover, and they also produce berries, a natural bird food, as well as nectar for butterflies and bees.

Any regularly clipped hedge becomes very dense and so can be ideal nesting cover. Even species such as *Leylandii*, which has little other wildlife value, will be used by birds for nesting and roosting. Climbers such as ivy, clematis and honeysuckle may also be used as nest sites if allowed to form dense tangles against a trellis or wall.



An open fronted box, suitable for robins, pied wagtails or wren, tied to a tree with wire

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