

Introduction

Nestboxes are excellent substitutes for the holes found in old trees, and are an excellent way of encouraging birds into your garden.

[Build your own nestbox!](#)



Which bird box for which bird?

Most nest boxes are simply designed and have a hole in the front. This should be a different size depending on the type of bird you're trying to attract. They can be made or bought (see the links on the right for how to make your own).

Blue tits, coal tits and marsh tits: make or buy a box with a small hole, approximately 25mm across.

Make a bird box

Great tits, nuthatches, house sparrows and tree sparrows: put up a box with a slightly bigger hole, approximately 32mm across.

Robins, wrens and pied wagtails: these species prefer open-fronted boxes but these can be vulnerable to attack by cats so make sure you put them somewhere safe.

House martins: You can buy or make fake nest bowls to attract these summer visitors.

Treecreepers: specially designed boxes replicate natural nesting sites behind loose bark. The boxes are a narrow, tapered shape with a small hole at the top of one side.

Starlings: boxes for starlings need to be long with a hole near the roof. Place them high on walls as starlings sometimes nest in roofs or in the walls of dilapidated buildings.

Sparrows: gregarious birds such as sparrows nest close to each other in communal boxes, sometimes called terraces. This box has three compartments with a hole just under the lid at each side and in the centre. They may also nest naturally in the roofs of your house.

Siting your bird box

Site nest boxes so that they are sheltered from the wind, rain and strong sunlight. If they are in full sun, the chicks could overheat and die.

Position boxes 1.5-5m above ground for safety from predators and to replicate natural nesting habits.

It's best to put nest boxes up outside the breeding season, between August and February.

Check that any box you buy or make is dry and has small drainage holes at the bottom. If it has a lid, make sure it's secure so that magpies and squirrels can't raid the nest.

If you buy or make a nest box, ensure that the wood is untreated and comes from a sustainable source (look for the FSC logo).

If you are fixing your box to a tree try not to damage the trunk. Ideally, secure it with a strap.

It's important that the chicks have somewhere to perch when they first leave the nest, so put the box near some smaller branches that won't hold the weight of larger predators, but will support fledglings.

House martin nest bowls should be situated under the eaves of a house. As house martins often return to the same nesting sites, you're more likely to attract them to your nesting site if they already nest nearby.

Avoid putting up boxes in busy areas of the garden, such as near a bird table or feeders. Robins and wrens in particular look for nesting sites in good cover.

Don't line the box, birds will do this themselves. Leave pet or your own hair out in spring for them to collect. Don't leave out knitting wool or man-made fibres as these can be dangerous.

Birds don't always nest in convenient places — jackdaw nests may not enhance your chimney! If a nest is causing you problems, wait until the end of the breeding season before removing it. Put up a suitable box nearby as an alternative to returning birds.

How to maintain your bird box

Bird boxes should be cleaned out in the autumn when there's no risk of disturbing the occupants. Diseases and parasites can easily spread to new occupants.

Clean the box out with boiling water or buy specialised cleaning products.

Your box might not be used in the first year, as birds often choose a nesting site during the autumn, winter or early spring. Persevere — leaving your box up in winter may provide a useful roost in bad weather.

If you find unhatched eggs in the box you can only legally remove them between October and January and they must then be destroyed (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981).