



## Bird box

Human activity has imposed a range of pressures on bird populations across Britain – this includes a lack of nesting sites.<sup>2</sup> We can all help with the small act of building and installing nest boxes for our own gardens.

“The provision of nest boxes can mean the difference between the survival of a species and its loss from a particular area.”<sup>1</sup>

A simple nest box is straightforward to make using a small range of tools and techniques.<sup>1</sup> To mark out the design you will need a pencil, measuring tape and square and to fabricate the box you will require a saw, hammer and drill.

There are many excellent web sites which give details of designs and recommended dimensions for nest boxes. The most important thing is that you use your imagination and materials available to create a desirable home for the small birds in your area.

The size of the entrance hole is important as this determines the species of bird that can use the nest box.<sup>3</sup>

ENTRANCE HOLE SIZE <sup>4</sup>	
Size (mm)	Species
25	Blue Tits, Coal Tits, and Marsh Tits
28	Great Tits and Tree Sparrow
32	House Sparrow and Nuthatches
45	Starlings

Rather than drilling a hole you can omit the top portion of the front panel so the same type of box can be used by Robins and Wrens.<sup>3</sup>



“Wood is the best material for making nest boxes.”<sup>1</sup>

Almost any type of wood will be satisfactory but softwood is the most readily available. New timber can be expensive so it's cheaper to use salvaged wood such as old floor boards or pallets. Timber should be at least 15mm thick as this insulates the box from the cold and heat.<sup>3</sup>

NEST BOX DIMENSIONS <sup>1</sup>			
Box Size	Base (mm)	Height (mm)	Mounting (m)
Small	100x100	150	1.2-5.0
Medium	150x150	200	3.0-5.0
Large	200x200	450	over 5.0

These dimensions are guidelines only - it is simpler and easier to make your nest box according to the wood available.<sup>1</sup> Once marked out and sawn the pieces can be fixed together with nails or screws.



The roof needs to be finished with roofing felt or similar to keep out the rain. It's best to provide overhangs to all sides to throw off rainwater and provide shading from direct sun.

Once constructed its best to paint the box with two coats of preservative to protect the wood. This should be a non-toxic water based finish. Oil based preservatives are potentially poisonous and for the same reason you should not treat the inside of the box.<sup>1</sup>

It is best to install nest boxes in the autumn either high on a wall or to a tree trunk.<sup>3</sup> Recommended heights are given above. The direction of the box is not that important provided it is sheltered by an overhanging eave or tree from the prevailing wind and rain. A more exposed box is best located with the box facing between north and east to avoid direct sunlight.<sup>4</sup> Make sure there are no obstacles in front of the entrance to give the birds have a clear flight path to the box.<sup>4</sup> All boxes should be located away from possible predators - so try to fix the boxes where cats cannot climb.<sup>3</sup> Sparrows nest in loose colonies so two or three boxes can be sited together on the same side of the house high up under the eaves.<sup>4</sup> Nails and screws can damage trees. I therefore screwed vertical battens to the rear of the box and used stout wire to tie it to the tree.

**“All boxes should be cleaned annually.”<sup>1</sup>**

Bird nests can be infested with various parasites and therefore boxes need to be cleaned each autumn. Providing a hinged lid or removable side allows the box to be easily cleaned out.<sup>1</sup> At the same time you can check each box and undertake any necessary repairs.

It's probably best to begin with a few uniformly spaced boxes in your garden. However, you should aim to provide a diverse range<sup>1</sup> - so be creative and vary dimensions, hole size, roof form and external finishes. Fix them at different heights and directions to both trees and walls.

Once you have reached what you think is a maximum provision in your own garden - keep making nest boxes they make excellent gifts for friends and family.



“Even humble garden nest boxes are important...”<sup>1</sup>

There are some 27 million households in Britain<sup>5</sup> and some 85% of these have gardens.<sup>6</sup> This means that nearly 23 million of us have a garden of some kind. If we all made and installed just one nest box, 23 million small acts could “transform the world”<sup>7</sup> and greatly assist the survival of British birds.

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