

Nestboxes for Garden Birds

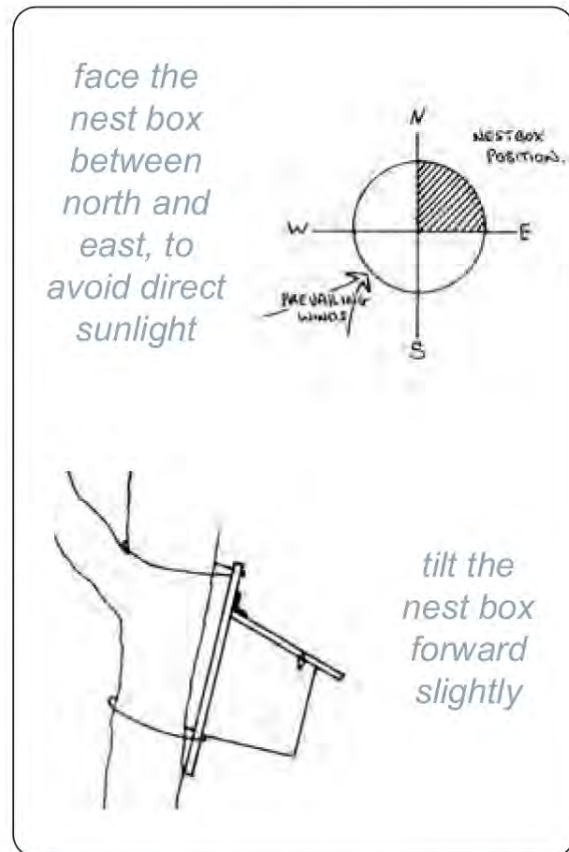


Nest boxes

There is a certain pride, not to mention fascination, in having birds nesting around your garden. There is also the added bonus that the young are all fed on insects, many of which are pests in the fruit and vegetable garden. If you have a choice, put up nest boxes in the autumn or late winter. Birds may well use the box over the winter months to roost and will prospect the box in spring. The siting of the box is very important, and will vary depending on the type of box (open-fronted or hole-fronted) and species targeted. The box shouldn't expose the intended occupants to predators or to the elements.

Seek a place that will provide natural shade for the box during the day, and face it between north and east, to avoid strong sunlight and prevailing winds and rain. Tilt the box slightly forward so that any driving rain will hit the roof and bounce clear. Remember, nest boxes bring you closer to garden birds and their daily trials and tribulations: mortality of eggs, chicks and adult birds can result in a sorry end to a nesting season. Birds lay big clutches and repeat clutches to cater for these eventualities.

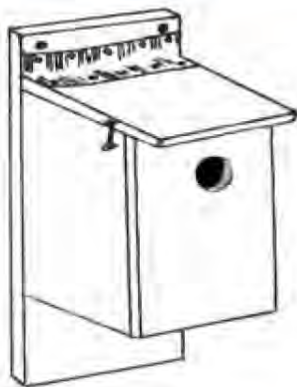
Specialist boxes for popular summer migrants such as house martins and swallows are increasingly important where modern living excludes old out buildings with suitable openings, and fosters intolerance to 'untidiness' around the house and garden. House martins will use a cup-shaped nest box with a crescent opening, placed under eaves or a gable end. Swallows use an open-topped cup nest box, placed in a porch or shed, with access through an open window or gap. For designs of other nest boxes mentioned in the species accounts we recommend consulting *Nestboxes*, by Chris de Feu



open-fronted nest box

Top Ten Users of Garden Nest Boxes

	hole-fronted box	open-fronted box	preferred height
	hole diameter	front opening	
blue tit	25mm	-	>2m
great tit	28mm	-	>2m
house sparrow	32mm	-	>2m
robin	-	60mm	<2m
pied/grey wagtail	-	60mm	2–4m
wren	25mm	60mm	< 2m
coal tit	25mm	-	<2m
starling	45mm	-	>4m
spotted flycatcher	-	60mm	>4m



hole-fronted box

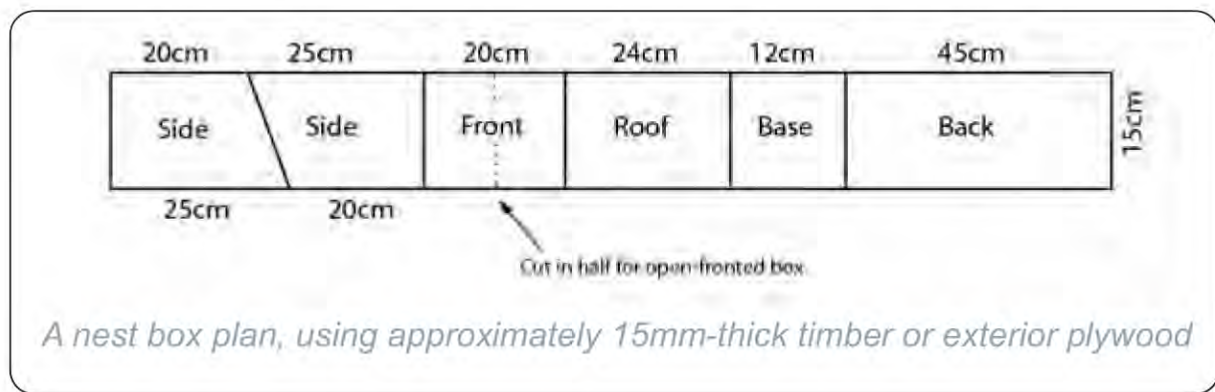


open-fronted box

Fixing and Maintaining Nest Boxes

You can make or buy a nest box. If you are buying one choose your nest box from a supplier or manufacturer that places substance over style. Wooden boxes can be treated with a water-based preservative that will not affect the birds. Fixing your nest box to a tree with nails may result in damage to the tree. It is better to attach it either with a nylon bolt or with wire covered in a length of hosepipe around the trunk or branch, or to use a screw which can be loosened off.

Boxes should have access from above or the side via a hinged panel to allow for cleaning and nest removal after the breeding season (September or October). Various feather parasites and insect scavengers may be present, and some will disperse in the initial clean up. Boiling water will kill off parasites; let the box dry out thoroughly before replacing the lid. Don't use insecticides or flea powders!



The box can be enhanced as a winter roosting place for small mammals or birds by dispersing hay or wood shavings in the box once it has dried out after cleaning. Remember this can deter birds from using it for nesting unless it is removed in late winter.

Boxes for Biodiversity

There is such a range of boxes for just about every garden creature: bats, bees, bugs, hedgehogs, frogs, etc, to the extent that some commentators have grown cynical and question how wildlife survived before the advent of the wooden box. However, don't let this attitude discourage you: natural hole sites are in short supply. Well-sited boxes set in a good garden design and planting will ensure a healthy stream of visitors to the garden.



hinged lid on a house sparrow nest box

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