

Want winged tenants?

Follow these steps to better birdhouses.

1 Select the right location

Each bird species has its own habitat requirements, so it's important to place birdhouses in a suitable location. For example, a bluebird house should be placed in an area surrounded by open fields. Chickadees are just the opposite. They prefer nesting houses in a thicket or a stand of small trees and shrubs. House wrens like houses that hang from small trees in a fairly open yard. Purple martins prefer apartment houses placed on top of a 15 to 20 foot pole in the middle of a lawn or open field, while tree swallows want to be close to water, where they can find insects to eat and feed to their young.

2 Pick the proper house design

Different birds also require different birdhouse designs to accommodate their needs. Purple martins like to live in large communities. Therefore, a condo or apartment style house with many rooms is perfect for them. House, on the other hand, live in single small houses, and prefer not to have other birds nearby.

Bluebirds require single room dwellings, but because house sparrows and tree swallows like the same kind of houses and often the same locations, bluebirds frequently have to compete with these other species for a place to nest. Hanging these nest boxes in groups can help ensure there's room for all. Though they are comfortable with other bluebirds nesting nearby, 50 to 75 yards apart is close enough. House sparrows are the least particular house dwellers. They will nest in almost any birdhouse as long as they can get in the front door.

3 Use a birdhouse that fits

Generally, small birds need small houses and large birds require large houses. House wrens are happy with an 8 inch high house with a 4 inch square or 4 by 6 inch base. Chickadees select houses of the same height with 4 inch square or 5 by 5 inch bases. Bluebirds need more room, so a 5 ½ by 5 ½ by 10 inch box is perfect. Wood ducks and screech owls need big houses, measuring 10 by 10 by 24 inches high. See the Birdhouse Building Guidelines chart for specific sizes for 16 bird species.

4 Focus on the front door

An essential aspect of selecting the right house is using one with the correct size entrance hole. This will accommodate the birds you want to attract, while potentially discouraging other species. House wrens require the smallest entrance, about 1 1/8 inches. This small size will also keep out birds you may not want, such as house sparrows. Chickadees, tufted titmice and nuthatches are comfortable with a 1 ¼ inch hole, while bluebirds need about 1 ½ inches to get inside. Large birds like wood ducks and screech owls like a doorway that is 4 by 3 inches, elliptically shaped and located about 20 inches above the floor of the birdhouse.

Tip

All birdhouses should be made of wood, ventilated around the top, have drainage holes in the floor, and be painted or stained an earth-tone color.



5 Get the height right

Birds generally prefer their nest boxes to be placed a certain height above the ground. Purple martin houses need to be about 15 to 20 feet above ground; wood ducks and screech owls like that same height, or higher. Bluebirds and tree swallows seek out houses that are about 5 to 8 feet high on a post. House wrens select homes 6 to 10 feet high and hanging from a tree, and chickadees favor birdhouses 4 to 8 feet above the floor of thicket.

6 Wait for tenants

Not all backyard birds nest in birdhouses, but enough do to make it worthwhile to put up a few and see what happens.

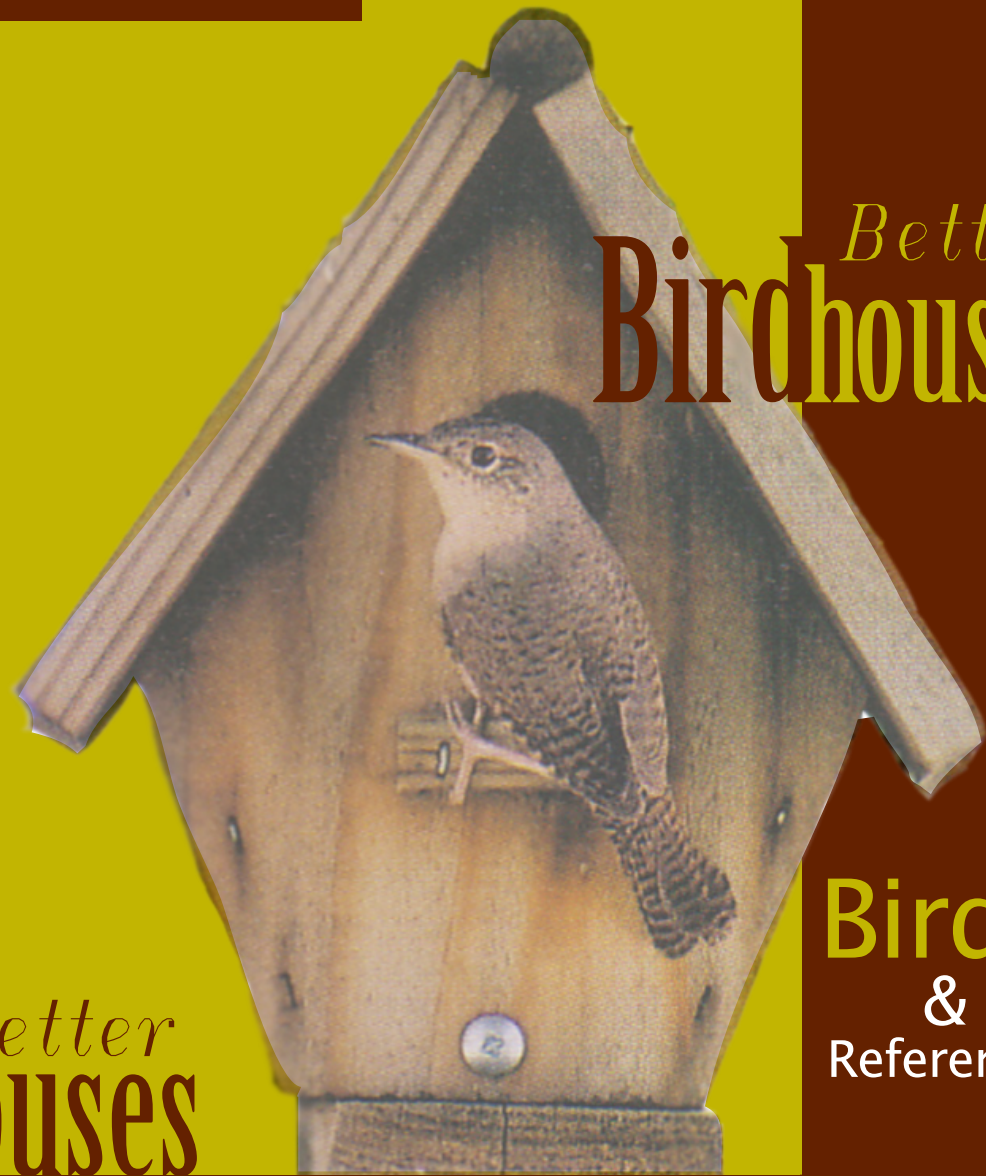
About 30 bird species in each region of the country are so called cavity nesters, which means that most of them will also use a birdhouse. Bluebirds, purple martins, house wrens, chickadees, tree swallows and house sparrows are the most common users of backyard birdhouses, but there are others, including wood ducks, screech owls, woodpeckers, titmice and nuthatches that can also be enticed into nesting in a birdhouse.

Not every birdhouse you put up will have birds in it, but the more you offer and the greater the variety, the better your chances of attracting tenants.

Species	Dimensions	Hole	Placement
Eastern bluebird	5"x 5"x 8"h	1 1/2" centered, 6" above floor	5-10' high in the open; sunny area
Tree swallow	5"x5"x6"h	1 1/2" centered, 4" above floor	5-8' high in the open; 50-100% sun
Purple martin	multiple apts. 6"x6"x6" ea	2 1/2" hole 2 1/4" above floor	15-20' high in the open
Tufted titmouse	4"x4"x8" h.	1 1/4"	4-10' high
Chickadee	4"x4"x8" h or 5"x5" base	1 1/8" centered 6" above floor	4-8' high
Nuthatch	4"x4"x10" h	1 1/4" centered 7 1/2" above floor	12-25' high on tree trunk
House Wren	4"x4"x8" h or 4"x6" base	1" centered 6" above floor	5-10' high on post or hung in tree
Northern Flicker	7"x7"x 18"h	2 1/2" centered, 14" above floor	8-20' high
Downey Woodpecker	4"x4"x10" h	1 1/4" centered 7 1/2" above floor	12-25' high on tree trunk
Red-headed woodpecker	6"x6"x15"h	2" centered 6-8" above floor	8-20' high on post or tree trunk
Wood duck	10"x10"x 24" h	4"x3" elliptical 20" above floor	2-5' high on post over water, or 12-40' high on tree facing water
American kestrel	10"x10"x 24" h	4"x3" elliptical 20" above floor	12-40' high on post or tree trunk
Screech-owl	10"x10"x 24" h	4"x3" elliptical 20" above floor	2-5' high on post over water, or 12-40' high on tree

Nesting Shelves

American Robin	6"x6"x8"h	none-needs roof for rain protection	on side of building or arbor or in tree
Barn swallow	6"x6"x8"h	none-does not need roof	under eaves of building
Phoebe	6"x6"x8"h	none-does not need roof	under eaves of building



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