

How to make a nest box for birds (1)

Safety

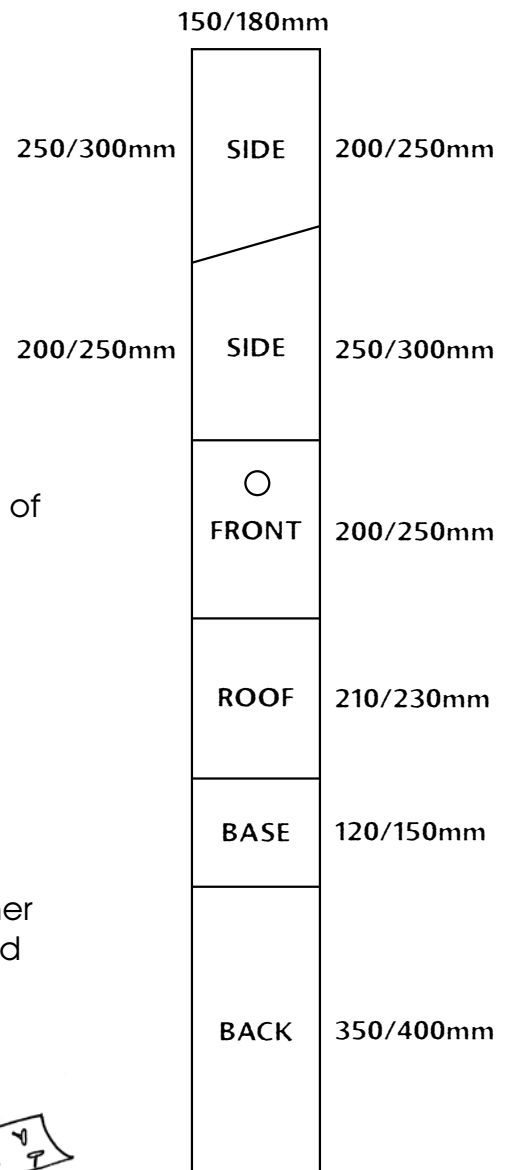
Tools can be dangerous when not used properly.

What you need

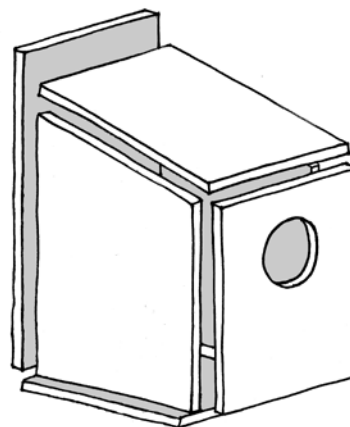
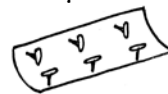
- Plank or sheet of weatherproof wood about 15mm thick – but don't use chemically treated wood, which may harm birds
- A rust-resistant brass or plastic hinge, or a strip of leather or rubber – for example a piece of bicycle inner tube
- Hammer, drill and saw
- Galvanised nails or screws
- Pencil and ruler

What to do

1. Cut your wood into sections, as shown in the diagram above. Follow the measurements either for the large box (for starlings and great spotted woodpeckers) or the small one (for all other garden birds).
2. Drill drainage holes in the bottom of the box.
3. Use galvanised nails or screws to fix the box together.
4. Leave it untreated, so it can weather and blend into its surroundings.
5. Attach the lid with your rust-resistant hinge or strip of leather or rubber. Don't nail it down – you'll need to clean the box out each autumn.
6. Use a strong catch to keep the lid in place.



Rubber strip



How to make a nest box for birds (2)

Things to remember

- The bottom of the entrance hole must be at least 125mm from the floor of the box. Any less, and young birds could fall out or be scooped out by a cat.
- The inside wall below the entrance hole should be rough. This will help the young birds to clamber up when it's time for them to leave.
- The size you should make the entrance hole depends on the species you hope to attract:
 - 25 mm for blue, coal and marsh tits
 - 28mm for great tits, tree sparrows and pied flycatchers
 - 32mm for house sparrows and nuthatches
 - 45mm for starlings.

Where to put your nest box

- It's best to put your nest box up in the autumn, when many birds are looking for a good place to roost.
- The nest box should face between the north and the east, to avoid strong sunlight and the wettest winds.
- Make sure the birds have a clear flight path to the nest, with no clutter directly in front of the entrance.
- Tilt the box forward slightly, so any driving rain will hit the roof and bounce away.
- Put your box at the right height from the ground for the species you want to attract:
 - boxes for most garden birds should be 2m to 4m up a tree or a wall
 - open-fronted robin and wren boxes should be low down, below 2m, well hidden in vegetation
 - woodpecker boxes should be 3m to 5m high on a tree trunk.
- If you are attaching your nest box to a tree, use a nylon bolt or some wire covered with a piece of hose wrapped around the trunk or branch – nails could damage the tree.
- Trees grow outwards as well as upwards, so check the fixing every two or three years.

How to make a nest box for birds (3)

Looking after your nest box

Most birds' nests harbour fleas and other parasites. To prevent them infesting young birds the following year, you will need to clean out the box.

- Remove the nest in the autumn. Remember, it's illegal to remove unhatched eggs at any time other than between August and January – and they must then be disposed of.
- Use boiling water to kill any remaining parasites.
- Let the box dry out thoroughly before replacing the lid. DO NOT use insecticides and flea powders.
- Once the box is clean and has dried thoroughly, you could place a small handful of clean hay or wood shavings (not straw) in it. Small mammals may hibernate there, or birds may use it as a roost site.
- Don't inspect your nest box once it's in use – instead, just watch and enjoy from a distance.

If you want to see chicks as they grow, you could consider installing a nest box camera before the breeding season starts.