

Get Your Bird Houses Ready Now

Providing bird houses and shelves can be a fun and rewarding part of a wildlife program. It doesn't matter where you live - in an apartment, townhouse or single family dwelling in a town, a suburb or the country.

Materials

Bird houses and shelves can be made from a variety of materials including wood, PVC pipe or even gourds. Reusing scrap wood from other building projects will help you save money and reduce waste. Use galvanized or aluminum nails or screws because they don't rust. Make sure that sharp points don't protrude into the box cavity—these might injure the birds.

Paint

If you use durable, long-lasting cedar, you don't need to paint the bird house or shelf. If you use less durable woods, exterior latex is recommended. If you choose a color, use natural tones such as light brown, gray or dull green. Martin houses are the exception since they are placed in open locations: paint these white to reflect heat. Do not paint the interior of the nest box or the entrance hole.

Drainage

Drill a few small holes in the floor. Leave 1/2 inch gaps under the eaves or drill several 1/4- to 5/16-inch holes along the top for ventilation.

Entrances

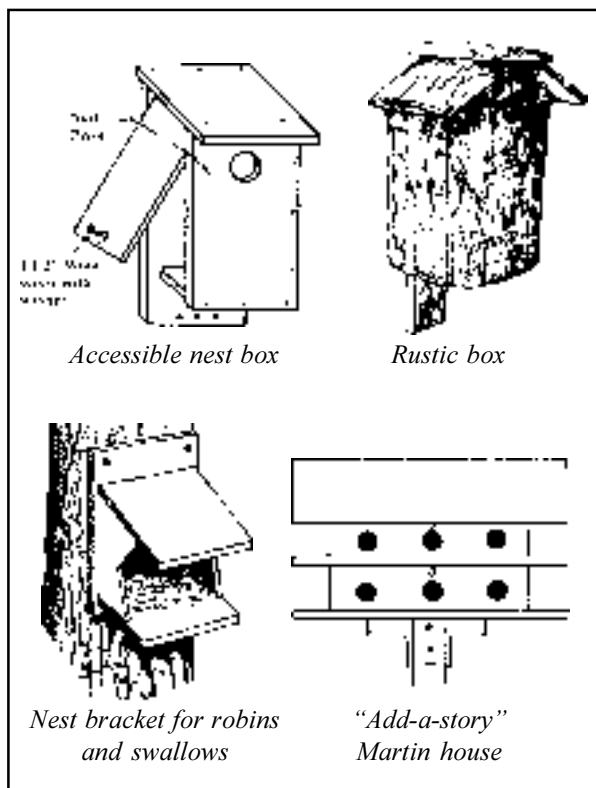
Birds are pretty picky about the entrance hole size so measurements need to be exact. Avoid perches because birds don't need them. In Nebraska, face the entrance hole in a southeasterly to northeasterly direction to prevent chilling cold spring rains from making the birds uncomfortable.

Sanitation

Nest boxes and shelves should be cleaned prior to each nesting season and after each brood.

Tips

- Think about the birds most likely to visit your backyard and decide what type of nest box or platform is best.



- Houses mounted on metal poles are less vulnerable to predators. Consider the habitat preferences for birds before hanging your bird house. Certain birds prefer open areas, others like wrens, prefer trees or shrubs.
- Now is the time to hang a wire cage filled with natural fibers, twigs, string or feathers. Backyard birds will use this material for nesting.
- Bird baths and fruit-bearing shrubs are attractive to many birds.

Resources

For more details, pick up the NebGuide *Backyard Wildlife, Bird Houses and Shelves* (G1427) from the extension office. You'll find dimensions needed to build bird houses and shelves for local birds, as well as facts about the birds. This publication is part of a series of NebGuides featuring *Backyard Wildlife: Feeding Birds* (G83-669), *Planting for Habitat* (G83-671), *Making It Come Alive* (G83-672), *Tips for Success* (G97-1332) and *To Feed a Hummingbird* (G97-1331). Or, visit the Lancaster County Web site to access these publications on-line at www.lancaster.unl.edu (SC)

Carpenter Ants Active in Early Spring

Most years, carpenter ants are the most common pest insects brought into the extension lab for identification. Because these ants sometimes live in the structural part of homes, they can be active inside, even when it is very cold outside. People start calling us about carpenter ants as early as January and February, but activity peaks in April.

Many people recognize the large, Black Carpenter Ant, *Camponotus pennsylvanicus*. It is the largest ant in Nebraska—workers can be 1/4- to 5/8-inch long. Winged carpenter ant females, the reproductive queens, can be even larger.

Another carpenter ant species, *Camponotus ferrugineus*, is much smaller and is not completely black. Its thorax and legs are reddish brown. It is called the Rust-Colored Carpenter Ant to distinguish it from the black carpenter ant. The rust colored carpenter ant is active even earlier than the black species.

The presence of carpenter ants inside during the winter when it is too cold outside to be active, usually indicates that there is a colony living within the house. When colonies are large, winged reproductives (called swarmers) are produced and typically emerge from early spring through July, but swarming may also occur at other times of the year. The presence of winged carpenter ants inside a house is a definite indicator there is an infestation inside the house.

Both species commonly tunnel wood to start a colony. Sometimes the wood is wet or rotting—ants are attracted to the moisture and



Magnified view of a black carpenter ant queen

wet wood is easier to tunnel. The presence of carpenter ants may also indicate a hidden moisture problem. Infestations are often associated with leaky plumbing, roof rafters under a leaky roof, around and under windows, soffit or fascia board that may be rotted, porches and decks.

Controlling carpenter ants can be tough because the colony may be in the structural wood inside wall voids where you cannot see. Spraying workers with an aerosol "ant and roach spray" or liquid sprays will only give temporary results because most colony members (including the queen) won't be killed by the spray. Effective carpenter ant control means locating the colony and treating it directly.

For tips on locating colonies and information on control, refer to Carpenter Ants, fact sheet 004-01 on the internet (<http://lancaster.unl.edu/enviro/pest/bug.htm>) or call 441-7180 for more information. (BPO)

Environmental Focus



Pest-Proof Your House

Fix Conducive Conditions

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Extension Educator

Household pests generally come in from outside—either we bring them in or they wander in from outside. Recognizing conducive conditions that favor pests outdoors in the yard and eliminating them can reduce the likelihood of pests inside.

- At the Urban Pest Management Conference, January 17-18, Bobby Corrigan, a nationally known pest control consultant, discussed some of the most common conducive conditions.
- Eliminating major entry points like garage doors and dryer vents. Mice enter through cracks only 1/4 inch wide and easily enter ill-fitting garage doors. If you can't eliminate entry, then you should plan on some sort of regular rodent control, especially in the fall of the year. Because mice can crawl vertically, unscreened dryer vents are another easy way for them to get into the house. Screen dryer, kitchen and bathroom vents with heavy gauge 1/4 inch hardware cloth.
- Examine the outside of your house and make sure that trees, shrubs and vegetation do not touch the sides or roof. Prune dead limbs from trees.
- Make sure gutters are not clogged and downspouts carry water away from the founda-

tion. Fix leaky roofs and replace any rotted wood.

- Seal cracks and crevices. Most accidental invaders (i.e., spiders, boxelder bugs, clover mites, crickets) get into the house by hiding in a crack. Make sure windows are well caulked. Fix cracks in foundations. Use weather stripping around and under doors to reduce the size of cracks (you'll also save on heat/air conditioning costs.)
- Be aware that some materials, like wood mulch, create ideal conditions for some pests to live in. A few pests that live in and around wood mulch include pillbugs and sowbugs, millipedes, crickets and spiders. Termites feed on wood mulch, so you may want to use it sparingly next to the house. Any untreated wood that is touching the soil is potential food for termites. This includes firewood, fences and landscape timbers.

For each pest, there are specific management recommendations based on the pest's biology and habits. Most pests can be eliminated or at least reduced by low toxic methods.

For more information, contact the Lancaster County Extension Office at 441-7180. Many recommendations can be found on our Web site at <http://lancaster.unl.edu/enviro/pest/bug.htm>.

Uses of CCA-Treated Wood Will be Removed

On Feb. 12, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a voluntary decision by the wood-treatment industry to remove treated lumber containing arsenic from consumer use. This action primarily includes wood that is treated with chromated copper arsenate, also known as CCA-treated wood. CCA-treated wood resists insect attack and decay for decades.

After Dec. 31, 2003, the wood-treating industry will no longer be able to treat CCA wood intended for use in decks, picnic tables, landscaping timbers, residential fencing, play structures and similar uses. Wood treated prior to this date, however, can still be used in residential settings. Already-built structures containing CCA treated wood are not affected by this decision.

The EPA has not concluded that CCA-treated wood poses any unreasonable risk to the public or the environment. But,

because arsenic is a known human carcinogen, the EPA believes that reduction of exposure to arsenic is desirable. The EPA is expecting that the wood-treatment industry will transition and make available treated wood that does not contain arsenic.

Some of the following precautions should be followed to reduce exposure to arsenic in CCA-treated wood:

- Do not burn treated wood.
- Wash hands thoroughly after contact with wood.
- Food should not come into contact with treated wood.

If you have a deck or play set made of CCA-treated wood, you may want to apply a penetrating coating to exposed surfaces on a regular basis which may reduce migration of wood preservative chemicals from CCA-treated wood. Penetrating coatings include oil based, semitransparent stains. Talk to your local hardware store about available coatings. (BPO)