

## Nesting Boxes

Late fall is the best time of year to mount new nest boxes and clean out the old ones. To clean an existing nest box, dispose of the old nesting materials and wash the house with a mixture of ½ cup baking soda in one gallon hot water. Next spray the interior with white vinegar. It's best to clean out your nest boxes early in the day so that they'll be dry and back in place by nightfall. Always wear gloves when doing this chore.

If you're in the market for a new nest box, you may want to consider the following as you construct or shop for a home for the bluebirds, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches or wrens that frequent your backyard.

- Nest boxes should be constructed of wood at least ¾-inch thick to insulate the interior from cold and mid-summer heat. Be sure to avoid treated lumber.
- Look for nest boxes that are assembled with galvanized or brass screws.
- A roof that extends at least 4 inches beyond the front of the box will keep out the rain and predators that might reach the roof.
- The floor should have several quarter-inch drain holes to prevent flooding in the event that water does get in the box.
- There should be ventilation holes or slots near the top of the box to permit warm air to escape on hot summer days.
- The interior of the box should be unpainted—earth tone paints or stains on the exterior are OK.
- Nest boxes must be able to be opened for periodic cleaning and monitoring.
- All nest boxes should be protected with a predator baffle—it's better to have one or two successful boxes than 10 that will be raided by predators!
- Nest boxes should not have a perch. Perches give House Sparrows a place from which to defend the nest box and keep other more desirable species away. (House Sparrows are a major threat to bluebirds and other cavity-nesters. These exotic pests destroy eggs and kill the young and adults of our native species.)



These tips are the recommendations of Scott Shalaway. To learn more, consult *A Guide to Bird Homes and Building a Backyard Bird Habitat* by Dr. Shalaway.