

TUTORIAL: THE "BASICS" OF GOURD BIRDHOUSES

Contributed by
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A gourd birdhouse is a fun and easy project. But to be successful, you must first match the species you want to attract with its entrance hole requirement, interior space requirement and appropriate placement. This tutorial, including the charts below, will be a great resource for getting the birdhouse 'move-in ready' in the correct habitat.

| Species | Floor of House | Depth of House | Hole Size | Hole Above Floor |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|------------------|
| Bluebird | 4"x4" | 8"-12" | 1 1/2" | 6"-10" |
| Chickadee | 4"x4" | 9" | 1 1/8" | 7" |
| Titmouse | | | 1 1/4" | |
| Nuthatches | | | 1 3/8" | |
| Carolina Wren | 4"x4" | 6"-8" | 1 1/2" | 4"-6" |
| House Wren | | | 1 1 1/4" | |
| Prothonotary Warbler | | | 1 3/8" | |
| Great-Crested Flycatcher | 6"x6" | 8"-10" | 1 3/4" | 6"-8" |
| Flickers | 7"x7" | 16"-18" | 2 1/2" | 14"-16" |
| Purple Martins | 6"x6" | 6"-10" | 2 1/4-2 1/2" | 2 1/2" |



Step One – Select & Prepare the Right Gourd

1. Select a gourd that it is strong and without cracks in the overall structure. Avoid thin-shelled gourds because they can be easily damaged and might let in rain or predators.

2. Once you have selected your gourd, be sure to thoroughly scrub the outside. You can do this by soaking the gourd in warm water for about five minutes and using a pot scrubber.

3. Next you will need to check the chart above to see the location and size of the entrance holes for the particular species of bird you would like to attract. Once you have the dimensions, use a drill with a hole saw, spade bit or carefully drill a circle of holes with a conventional bit so that you can punch out the entrance hole. Then clean the inside.



Step Two – Construction Tips

4. Use a 1/4" drill bit and make at least four holes in the bottom to allow moisture/water to drain.

5. Use the 1/4" drill bit to make a few ventilation holes in the sides to help avoid overheating inside the birdhouse, and a pair of holes at the peak of the gourd for the leather or wire hanger.

6. Gourds may be left natural or painted with a light-colored, non-toxic paint. Lighter colors will reflect the sun's heat.

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GOURD BIRDHOUSES CONT



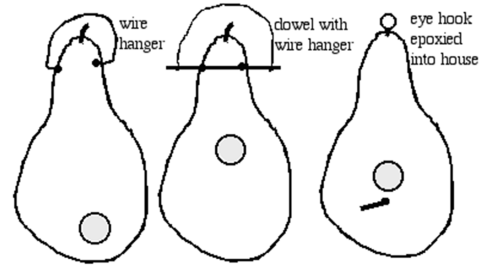
7. Protect the gourd with a good varnish, such as a Spar urethane which will hold up better under the sun's UV rays. Two thin coats are better than one heavy coat of paint.
8. DO NOT paint or varnish the interior of the birdhouse.
9. Purple Martin houses should be painted white or left natural with a exterior urethane finish



Step Three – Installation Tips

10. In North Carolina, all birdhouses should be installed by late March or early April.
11. Spacing of birdhouses depends upon the species. General guidelines are to place birdhouses at least 50 to 300 feet apart to account for the territorial nature of most species.

12. Firmly attach birdhouses to posts, trees, or buildings.



Size and location of entrance holes and use of perch depends upon species of birds for which the house is being built.

13. Place birdhouses where they'll receive some shade during the day. In pasture situations, place the box outside the fence from nosy livestock!

| Species | Box Height | Placement |
|---|------------|--|
| Carolina Wren House Wren Nuthatches Chickadees | 5'-10' | Woodland clearings; edges |
| Bluebirds Flickers | 6' | Open areas: fields, gardens, pastures |
| Great-Crested Flycatcher | 8'-20' | Forest interiors |
| Prothonotary Warbler | 4'-12' | Wetland areas; over/facing water |
| Titmouse | 5'-15' | Hardwood stands |
| Purple Martin | 12'-18' | Erect the houses on a pole or pipe in cluster in an open area away from trees and near a pond. |

Step Four – Maintenance Tips

14. Clean out birdhouses each year after the young have fledged. You can use a barbeque grill fork with the tines slightly bent at the ends to help scrape out old nesting material. Some species of birds will fledge two or even three batches of young if the birdhouse is cleaned.

15. Inspect birdhouses regularly and consider adding predator guards if necessary.

Check for ants, bees and wasps that may think your new gourd birdhouse would be a fine home as well.

16. Remember that gourd birdhouses are like thin wood and will eventually rot from exposure to sun, wind and rain. Inspect them regularly and recoat the exterior in the winter if necessary.

