

UI Extension Forestry Information Series

Building Birdhouses to Attract Insect-Eating Birds

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Birds are important in the control of insects in your forest. It's been well documented that birds regulate populations of forest pests, including bark beetles, larch casebearer, spruce budworm and tussock moth. You can encourage a wide variety of birds in your woodlot by maintaining a diversity of plants and leaving standing dead trees for birds to hollow-out nesting sites.

Common insect-eaters easily attracted to nesting boxes are house wrens, swallows and chickadees. House wrens and swallows (tree and violet-green) are summer residents. Three species of chickadee (black-capped, mountain and chestnut-backed) reside year-round, often forming gregarious groups during winter.

Conveniently, all of these birds use a similar sized nesting box. They will all use a 1 1/4 inch entrance hole. If sparrows are a problem in your area, use a 1 1/8 inch entrance hole as the chickadees and house wrens can still enter the box but sparrows will be excluded. Any wood will do, but I like rough-hewn cedar for mine. You may use nails to assemble your birdhouse, but I prefer using deck screw because they hold the house together better as the wood shrinks and ages. Refer to the diagram for assembly.

House wrens prefer shrubby wood margins and thickets. Male house wrens begin nest building before the females arrive, and often fill every potential nesting site in the area, either to give the female a better selection or to ward off competing wrens. You'll have better luck attracting wrens if you put up several houses for them.

Black-capped chickadees inhabit similar areas as wrens, but also coniferous and mixed coniferous-hardwood forest. Tree swallows prefer wood margins but violet-green swallows will nest within stands of trees.

Several good publications dealing with nesting boxes and attracting birds include: *The Complete Birdhouse Book* by Donald and Lillian Stokes, published by Little, Brown and Company (ISBN 0-316-81714-7); *How to Attract Birds* by Ortho (ISBN 0-89721-011-5); *Garden Birds, How to Attract Birds to Your Garden* by Noble Proctor, published by Rodale Press (ISBN 0-87857-592-8).

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