

MAKING A BLUEBIRD BOX

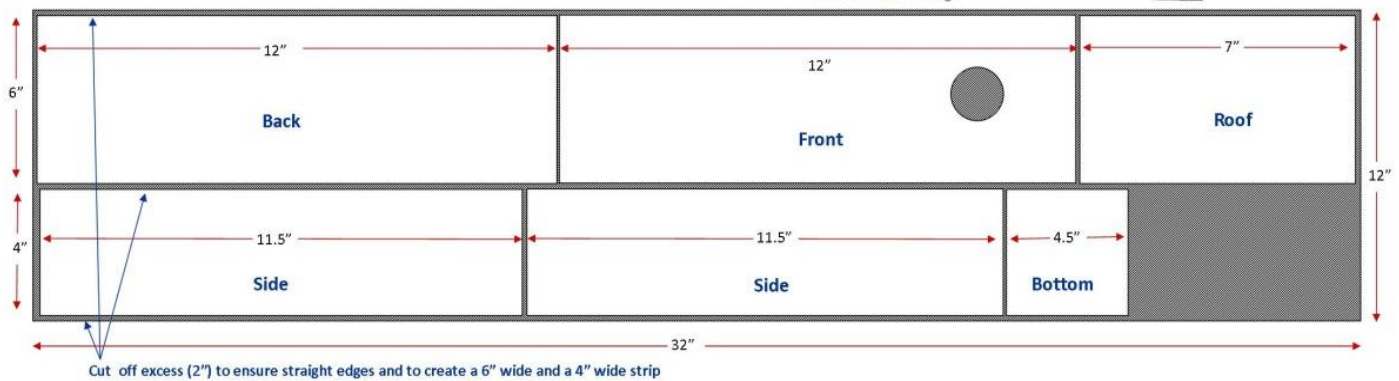
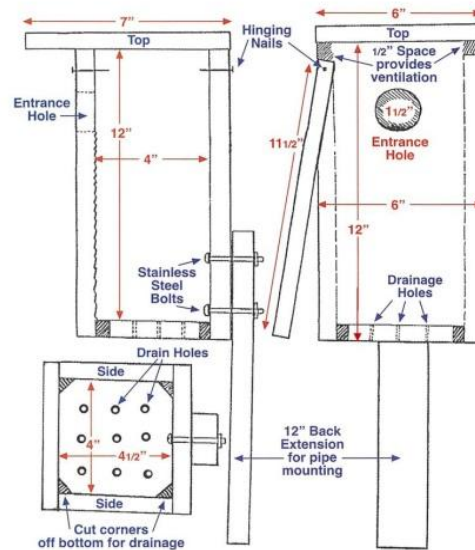


BLUEBIRD BOX

Construction & Board Diagram

MATERIALS LIST (makes 3):

- Standard board 0.75" thick x 12" wide x 8' long (cut into 3 - 32" lengths)
- Standard board 0.75" thick x 1" wide x 36" long (cut into 3 - 12" lengths)
- 2" s/s bolts (attaching back extension) -- 6 (2 per box)
- 1-3/4" s/s nails -- approx. 60 (~20 per box)



Important Notes:

- The entrance hole must be 1½" diameter to allow Bluebirds to enter but to exclude the larger Starlings.
- One side of the box is hinged with nails at the top so that it can be opened to check on the birds. The hinging nails must line up for the door to open smoothly. A door catch can be made by hammering a nail into the box edge and bending it over the edge of the door. It can then be swivelled up to open the door.
- The inside front panel should be roughened by scratching the wood, to help adult birds and chicks get purchase with their claws to exit the box.
- Attaching the post with screws instead of nails ensures the box will not work loose in the wind.
- Do not put a perch on the front of the box. Bluebirds do not need this to enter and it allows predator birds to perch and stick their heads in the box to kill adults or chicks inside.
- Boxes can be painted and decorated on the outside with any light colour of lead-free paint. Avoid dark colours, especially on the roof, as it will make the box too hot.



MANAGING A BLUEBIRD BOX

Where, how and when to mount the box

Bluebird boxes should be mounted on poles to prevent access by predators. Mounting boxes on trees or walls enables access by rats and lizards. A 7 foot long, 2" diameter galvanised pipe is ideal – sink the pipe 18" into the ground. Plastic piping may be used but should be filled with concrete to make it stiffer so it does not rock in high winds. To prevent rats, ants and lizards from climbing the pole use Vaseline to grease a length of 4-6 inches halfway up the pole.

Mount the box in an open grassy area with scattered trees and low ground cover. There should be nearby perch sites such as trees or fences where Bluebirds can perch to look for food. If using more than one box, mount them at least 100 yards apart.

Bluebirds begin nesting in early March, so this is when you should put up your box. Sparrows are more likely to take over a box that is put up earlier. At the end of every nesting season (end of August) remove old nest material from the box and pour boiling water through it to sterilise it. Store the box inside for the winter and put it out again the first week of March each year.

Monitoring the box

It is very important to monitor your Bluebird box. You should check inside the box once or twice a week, except in the final week before fledging. Bluebirds do not generally mind being checked, but disturbance in the last few days before the chicks leave the nest could cause them to fledge prematurely.

An un-monitored Bluebird box becomes a breeding site for Sparrows. Sparrow nests should be removed and thrown in the trash as soon as they are constructed. This process may need to be repeated several times until the Sparrows give up and nest elsewhere. A Bluebird nest is cup-shaped and neat, often made of casuarina needles. A Sparrow nest is very messy and made of grass, feathers and even pieces of trash.

Once Bluebirds have settled in the box, mark on a calendar when you see the first egg (mothers lay an egg every consecutive day) and then you can deduce the time of hatching (13-14 days) and fledging (18-20 days). Keep your cat/s indoors during fledging when the chicks first come out of the box; within a few hours they should be safely up in nearby bushes where the adult birds will continue to feed them for a week or so.

Dealing with ants and mites

It may be necessary to remove broken or unhatched eggs or dead chicks so that ants do not invade the nest. You should also watch for red mite infestation. These are tiny, pin-prick size insects that feed on the blood of chicks. If the chicks do not appear to be thriving, hold your hand against the nest for a minute. If mites are present they will be attracted to the warmth of your hand and crawl onto it. For a heavy infestation, remove the nest with the chicks in. Very gently place the chicks on kitchen paper in a cardboard box (to avoid excess exposure to light). As mites jump onto the paper, kill them. Discard the nest and pour boiling water through the box. Make a new nest from dead casuarina needles. Place the new nest and chicks back in the box. It is said that putting some pipe tobacco under the nest will discourage mites.