

# Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

## FACT SHEET



**Have Gardening Questions?** The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).  
Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: [mgghelp@masshort.org](mailto:mgghelp@masshort.org).

### Tips for Birdhouses in Your Garden

Hanging a birdhouse on your property is a great way to invite native birds to nest safely nearby and provides additional beauty and enjoyment to your garden. Birds will be safe only if the birdhouse you put up meets certain standards. Each species of bird has its own needs in terms of where the house is mounted and other details for the house – or nesting box – itself. There are some things, though, that are common to almost all species of native birds.

#### What it's Made of:

Most birdhouses should be made out of wood. The wood should be cedar, pine, or fir and it should not be pressure-treated or treated with any other preservative, except linseed oil. It may be painted, but should be painted with colors that blend with the environment. The inside should never be painted or stained or treated in any way.

#### How it's Made:

- The roof should have an overhang of 1-3" over the entrance hole to keep water out.
- The roof should have a pitch to allow water to run off.
- There should be several ¼" holes near the top of the sides of the box for ventilation, as well as several holes in the bottom for drainage.
- Construction should be done with galvanized screws, not nails.
- There should be a hinged roof or side to allow access to clean the house.
- If there's a perch on the front of the house, TAKE IT OFF, to protect the birds from non-native birds and other predators.
- Ideally, the entrance hole will face slightly downward to keep out rain and wind.
- The size of the entrance hole will determine which birds are most likely to use the house to nest in. Research books or web sites for the requirements specific to the bird you want to attract. The interior should have a rough surface and grooves so young birds can get a grip.

#### How to Locate the Birdhouse:

The birdhouse should be mounted on a tree or a pole or even on a wire, depending on the species. Different species of birds

prefer houses at specific heights from the ground.

- Predators should be discouraged not only by the location of the birdhouse, but by the placement of baffles around the pole, if this is how the house is mounted.
- The entrance should face away from the prevailing winds.
- In general, it's best to place no more than two houses per acre of property.
- Examples:

**Eastern Bluebird**—Position a house on a pole in an open area, preferably on the edge of woods; 4 - 12 feet off the ground. Hole should be 1-1/2" diameter, 5" - 6" above the floor.

**Purple Martins**—Martins are colonial nesters. Position a house with 4 or more compartments in an open field on a 20 foot pole. Each compartment is 6" x 6" x 6". The hole is 2-1/2" and should be only 1" above the floor.

Find more information on housing for specific birds in "sources" below.

#### Maintenance:

- A birdhouse can be placed out at any time of year, but it's good to have it mounted, aired and cleaned, and ready by early spring.
- Locate birdhouses in partial shade, in an area where there is free access to fly in, but also where there is a tree or shrub nearby to watch for predators.
- The birdhouse will require at least annual cleaning, making sure that the drainage and ventilation holes are free of debris. If the birds have multiple broods, the house can be cleaned in between.

#### Read More:

- Audubon Society, "Nest Box Chart" [www.birds.audubon.org](http://www.birds.audubon.org)
- National Wildlife Federation, "Choose the Right Birdhouse" [www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org)
- 50 Birds "70 Birds That Nest in Birdhouses" [www.50birds.com](http://www.50birds.com)
- Cornell Lab of Ornithology "Attracting Birds with Nest Boxes" [www.allaboutbirds.com](http://www.allaboutbirds.com)
- "The Audubon Birdhouse Book" by Margaret A. Barker and Elise Wolfson

*The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>*