

Where's best for nest box?

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<http://www.thisisgloucestershire.co.uk/forest/f2entertainment/f2gardening.html/s-best-nest-box/article-186242-detail/article.html>

The first thing to think about when siting a bird box is your own safety. When working at height, take care that the ladder is safe and always work with a buddy who can hold the ladder. Better still erect a tower scaffold around the tree.

The following location details are taken from the RSPB web site. Additional on-site advice was given by Barry Embling, the RSPB's man in the Forest of Dean.

Naturally, the location selected depends on the type of bird you hope to attract. Ideally nest boxes should be fixed into place during autumn. Birds will enter nest boxes during autumn and winter, looking for a place to roost or feed. They often use the same boxes for nesting the following spring. However, tits will not investigate nesting sites until February or March.

Boxes for tits, sparrows or starlings should be fixed between two to four metres up a tree or a wall.

Unless there are trees or buildings which shade the box during the day, face the box between north and east to avoid the worst of the weather and prevent the box and its inhabitants becoming overheated in sunny weather.

When selecting a location check that cats cannot get at the box. The birds will need a clear flight path to the nest, without clutter directly in front of the entrance and not over ledges or shelves that cats could sit on.

If the box is located where it is exposed to driving rain, tilt it forward slightly so that the rain will not drive into the entrance.

House sparrows and starlings will readily use nest boxes placed high up under the eaves.

Since these birds nest in loose colonies, two or three nest boxes could be sited on the same side of the house. These nest boxes must be spaced well apart from each other and kept away from areas where house martins normally nest.

Open-fronted nest boxes, for robins and wrens, need to be low down, below 2m and well hidden in vegetation. Those for spotted flycatchers need to be 2-4m high, sheltered by vegetation but with a clear outlook. Woodpecker boxes need to be 3-5m high on a tree trunk with a clear flight path and away from disturbance.

Following the advice of Barry Embling, we located two, open fronted nest boxes in the timber yard at Hale & Co (Drybrook).

Every year birds nest in stacks of timber in the timber yard. We hope that these open fronted nest boxes will attract robins, pied wagtails or wrens. Who knows? They were fixed far too late to be used this year but they will be well weathered-in for next autumn and spring. We screwed one box to the wall and the other to timber uprights of an open shed. Away from cats (we hope), not exposed to strong sunlight or winds and about the right height. We chose to locate one close to the rainwater down pipe so that it would not be in the way when timber is stacked in the yard.

Two boxes located close together may be occupied by the same species of bird if there is plenty of natural food. This happens often in the countryside but it is rare in gardens, where only one nesting pair of a species would be expected.

The exceptions to this are house sparrows, tree sparrows and house martins, which are colonial nesters.

Fixing a nest box:

The nest box can be fixed directly to a tree, wooden upright or a wall. Drill a 5mm hole in the back piece of the box where the top extends beyond the lid.

This hole can be drilled through the inner tube hinge - if you're worried about the screw hole in the rubber hinge, stick an inner tube repair patch over it.

Drill a 5mm hole in the back piece of the box where the bottom extends beyond the bottom of the box. Take care to locate it so that the chuck of the drill does not rub on the bottom of the box.

When fixing to masonry wall (picture 1) hold the box in place and use a small masonry drill bit (3 or 4mm) to mark the location of the top hole on the wall. Remove the nest box and use the correct size drill bit (7mm in this case) for the wall plug.

Fix the top of the nest box, check the box is upright, and in the correct place, and mark a hole for the bottom fixing using the 3 or 4mm masonry drill bit.

Remove the box, or twist it out of the way, and drill the wall, fit the wall plug and the fix the box into place.

When fixing to a wooden support (picture 2) drill the 5mm holes in the nest box as mentioned above. Check that the holes are in the right place so that the screws will go into the timber upright

Push a 2in x 8g (or 10g) screw into the top fixing hole, align the box and drive the screw into the timber.

Check that the box is upright and drive in the bottom screw.

The same system applies when fixing to a tree if you are using screws.

You will probably need to pack the box so that it sits comfortably on to the tree.

If possible it is better to avoid using nails or screws to fix to a tree because they may damage the tree.

Use tree ties (picture 3) around the top and bottom of the box.

The top tie can be slipped between the rubber hinge at top of the box. You may want to nail or screw the bottom tie into place on the back piece of the box where the bottom extends beyond the bottom of the box. Two or three ties can be buckled together to form longer ties.

Alternative use two lengths of garden wire to fix the top and bottom of the box (picture 4).

Run the wires through lengths of hosepipe to protect the bark.

Trees grow in girth as well as height, so every two or three years check the ties and loosen them if necessary. Stand back and wait patiently.

For information about location and fixing nest boxes, visit the RSPB website
www.rspb.org.uk/advice/helpingbirds/nestboxes/smallbirds/siting.asp