

BLUEBIRD NEST BOX INSTALLATION

See page 3 for a reference photo.

MATERIALS:

Poles – 1 ¼ to 2 inches in diameter and 8 feet long work best. Use chain link fence top rails cut to length or discarded chain link fence posts that are 8 feet long or something similar.

Baffles – 4 inch diameter thin wall PVC pipe cut 30 inches long with two small holes drilled across from each other about 1 inch from the end of the baffle so wire can be inserted to attach the baffle to the nest box. This is a good general-purpose predator guard. It should be left loose so it moves when predators attempt to climb it.

BOX LOCATION:

NEVER install the nest boxes near a busy road. The boxes should be near mowed grassy areas. The entrance hole should face east to southeast, never into the prevailing wind and be about 5 feet above the ground. A tree or a large shrub should be about 50 feet away from the entrance hole as the Bluebirds like to perch near their box for hunting and to survey their territory for predators. This is also for the fledglings to have a place to land on their first flight. Nest boxes should also be at least 100 feet from a tree line. Trees too close to the boxes will invite House Wrens to use the boxes and may make it easy for squirrels and mice to jump onto the boxes. Spacing is very important in the location of the nest boxes. Male Bluebirds will not tolerate other male Bluebirds in their territories but they will tolerate Tree Swallows. Since Tree Swallows and Bluebirds co-exist (Tree Swallows feed on bugs in the air and Bluebirds feed on bugs on the ground), you may put a pair of two boxes within 8 feet of each other. Then if the Tree Swallow takes over one nest box, the Bluebird will have the other nest box. If you want a second pair, put it 200 – 300 feet from the other pair.

PIPE INSTALLATION:

Use the crow bar to start the hole for the pole. Going down about a foot with the crow bar will make the hole big enough for the pole to start in. This will give you an idea if there are rocks in the first foot, which will give you a problem with driving the pole down. Move to another location if there are large rocks. With the pole started in the hole, use the post-hole driver to drive the pole the rest of the way down. Go about 18 inches into the ground and tamp the dirt in around the pole at ground level. This is a good depth as the pole is stable, will last a long time, and leaves enough of the pole out of the ground to mount the nest box with the entry hole about 5 feet above the ground. Use the post-hole digger only as a last resort when the ground is too rocky to drive the pole in. Next the baffle goes on with the holes on the one end facing up.

BOX INSTALLATION:

There are two ways to attach the nest boxes to the pole: screws through the pole or u-bolts around the pole.

Screws through the pole method:

Tools that are helpful are a portable battery-powered drill, 5/16 inch self-starting metal cutting drill bit, pliers, screw driver, 7/16 inch wrenches, ¼ inch carriage bolts with flat washers and nuts (carriage bolts long enough to go through pole and back of box and have about ½ inch sticking through the box to put nut and washer on) and galvanized bailing wire to fasten the baffle on.

Enlarge the two center holes on the back of the box (1 above the nest box and 1 below the nest box) with the 5/16 inch drill. Then hold the box up on the pole at the height you want (entrance hole 5 feet from the ground) and facing the direction you want (east to southeast) and mark the top and bottom holes on the pole. Drilling the holes is a bit tricky at first. Drill the top hole first. Put the box up with the top bolt and recheck the bottom hole location before drilling it. Then take the box down and drill the bottom hole. Put the box up with the carriage bolts. Then, with the bailing wire, go through one of the small holes on the bottom of the box back, down through the two holes in the baffle and up through the other small hole on the box back. Pull the baffle up so it's about 4 inches below the bottom of the box, cut the wire and twist the ends together and push them up against the back so the sharp ends are not sticking out. Now check the door operation one more time just to make sure that nothing has shifted to cause the door not to open and close easily.

U-bolt method of installing nest boxes on round poles that are “user” friendly:

You will need 2 u-bolts, 1 for the top and 1 for the bottom. You will need to know the diameter of the pole in order to buy the correct size u-bolts. Too small a u-bolt and it will not fit; too large a u-bolt and it will be too difficult to get the u-bolt tight enough to keep the box from moving. The u-bolts CANNOT go through the nest box. They must go through the back piece of wood above the roof and below the floor of the nest box. The box must also be centered on the pole when mounted. The easiest way to do this is to draw a line down the center of the back of the nest box, then 2 inches from the top and 2 inches from the bottom of the back board, draw a line perpendicular through the center line. Center the u-bolts on the perpendicular lines so each leg of the u-bolt is equal distance from the center. Mark the “leg” locations and drill your holes. Try the u-bolts for fit and adjust the holes as needed. When out in the field, put the u-bolts around the pole and through the pre-drilled holes in your box. If your u-bolts do not come with a flat bar for the legs then use flat washers with nuts. Slide the box to your final height and evenly tighten the nuts. Use caution not to over tighten, or you may crack the back of the box. After the box has been up a couple of weeks, re-check to make sure the u-bolts are still tight. If not, re-tighten evenly and carefully. This method allows you to pre-drill all the holes before you go out into the field to install the boxes, and the height of the box above the ground is easily adjusted.

Last, identify the box either with a number or a letter on the door or the front of the box. This is a must for record keeping.

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