

**BBC**  
**breathing**  
**places**

**give**  
**a** **bird** **a**  
**home**



**pocket guide**

**BBC Breathing Places is a major BBC Learning campaign to inspire and motivate you to create and care for nature-friendly green spaces where you live.**

Getting out and enjoying nature can have great benefits for you and there are lots of exciting ways you can get involved.

**Go wild with Breathing Places at:  
[bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces](http://bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces)**

**“Many people spend hours watching reality TV shows, but the birds breeding in your garden can provide just as much real-life drama and excitement.”**

**Simon King**  
BBC's *Springwatch* presenter



# Home tweet home

Birds are among the most welcome guests to our gardens. Not only do they provide a sign that nature's thriving, they also feast on pests like slugs and snails and provide a colourful spectacle on any bird-feeder.

But sometimes our feathered friends need a helping hand, particularly when it comes to raising a family because, these days, competition for the best spots is pretty stiff.

So why not do one thing and become the greenest kind of property developer by putting up a nest box for a pair of lovebirds in your neighbourhood?



# Top tips for a nest box landlord

Putting up a nest box is one of the easiest ways to help local birds not just to survive, but also to multiply! And it doesn't have to cost a lot either.

If you or your kids are into DIY, why not pick up some tools and make your own? You only have to spend a few pounds and a few minutes to create a home that's ready for residents. And if DIY isn't your thing, nest boxes can be bought from most garden centres.

Either way, there are lots of different box styles available, so you're sure to find one to suit most spaces.

Your nest box will be an even bigger success if birds are visiting for other reasons too, so provide a regular supply of food and water as an extra incentive.

# Will it make a difference?

Imagine a spring morning without the dawn chorus or a summer evening without bird song – pretty dull! Yet many of Britain's best-loved garden birds are in serious decline.

As natural nesting sites, like the hollow branches of trees or the perfect nooks and crannies of old buildings, are cut down, demolished or renovated, nest boxes are becoming increasingly important.

Since 1997 alone nearly six million nest boxes have been put up around the country. And with an estimated two million baby birds being raised in nest boxes each year across the UK, you really can make a difference.

And if you set your nest box up in February, when birds will start looking for a place to call their own in time for the mating season, you'll make an even bigger impact.

# Which box for which bird?

Each species has a particular wish list, but generally two basic designs are good for most garden birds – open-fronted boxes or those with circular holes (the hole varying in size depending on the bird).

Here's a rough guide to get you started:

- Blue tits, coal tits, great tits, marsh tits, nuthatches, pied flycatchers and sparrows prefer small, closed boxes with smaller holes.
- Great spotted woodpeckers, green woodpeckers, jackdaws, little owls, starlings and stock doves go for larger, closed boxes with bigger holes.
- Blackbirds, pied wagtails, robins, song thrushes, spotted flycatchers and wrens all opt for open-fronted boxes.

If you live at the edge of woodland or you've heard owls hooting during the night, you could even try a larger owl box. Kestrels go for larger boxes too.



# Where to put it?

Different birds prefer different locations. Blue tits, for example, like boxes to be placed between 1.5 and 5 metres above the ground and clear from foliage that could block the entrance.

Robins, on the other hand, favour lower boxes that are hidden amongst shrubs and creepers.

Whatever the species, all boxes should be:

- safe from predators like cats and grey squirrels – a metal plate around the entrance can prevent holes from being chewed open;
- sheltered from wind, rain and strong sunlight – angling the front of the box downwards helps;
- clear of bird tables and feeders – too much activity can disturb nesting pairs;
- at a suitable distance from each other – too close and it may encourage aggressive behaviour between some species;
- erected using galvanised/stainless steel screws or nails as these don't rust. For trees, use fixings such as nylon bolts or padded wire looped around the trunk to prevent damage to the tree.

**Nest box**

**bingo**



You know which boxes they like, but how many of these can you identify?



**Blue tit** – Famous for nesting in unusual places like letter boxes, the female constructs her nest mainly from moss and lines it well with wool and feathers.

**Seen**



**Coal tit** – Prefers nest boxes to be mounted on conifers rather than deciduous trees and likes to nest really close to the ground, at a height of less than a metre.

**Seen**



**House sparrow** – Favourite nest sites include holes in buildings but, if these are not available, house sparrows will build untidy, detached nests within ivy.



**Seen**



**Pied wagtail** – Its cup-shaped nests are constructed from grass, twigs and moss and often sited in holes in walls, buildings and old nests of larger birds.



**Seen**



**Starling** – A fast-declining bird, the male starling attempts to improve his chances of attracting females by developing a complex song.



**Seen**



**Wren** – Using grass, leaves and moss, the male constructs the nest, with the female providing a warm, feather lining if his hard work is to her liking.



**Bingo!**

# Do One Thing

## Fancy trying other bird-related activities? How about these:

### Attend a nest box building event

National Nest Box Week kicks off on Valentine's Day every year. It's organised by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and supported by The Wildlife Trusts.

### Bathtime

Bathing and preening help birds to keep their feathers in good condition. Create a bird bath from any water-tight, shallow container. A rough surface will help stop birds slipping. Finally, locate in a position safe from predators.

### Bird watching

Once birds start using your nest box, expect to be entertained! First they'll be coming and going with materials to feather the nest, then they'll be working non-stop to feed their young and, as a grand finale, the fledglings will emerge to test their wings!

## Keeping up appearances

Use fresh, boiling water to clean boxes every autumn (unhatched eggs can only be legally removed between August and January and must be destroyed). Leave boxes up over winter as they may provide roosting sites in bad weather.

## Save our sparrows

Help sociable sparrows, who like to nest in groups, by erecting a box suitable for several families. Typically a box has three compartments with a hole just under the lid at each side, and one in the centre.

## Take part in a survey

Organisations like the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and BTO run regular surveys focusing on garden birds and nest boxes. Do your bit by contributing to this important national research.

For more details regarding these and other ideas, check out: [bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces](https://www.bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces)



do  
**one**  
thing

For more ideas of what you can  
do for nature, why not check out  
other Do One Thing activities at:

[bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces](http://bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces)

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