

Building a Bird box

You will need:

- Pencil and tape measure/ruler
- Carpenter saw
- Drill and screws or hammer and nails
- Length of waterproof rubber (pond liner or bicycle tyre inner will do!)
- Ladder
- Plank of wood (or whatever wood scraps you have to hand). Dimensions should be as close as possible to 15cm wide, 1.5cm thick and if using a plank 1.4m long.
- Optional: Staple gun
- Optional: Holesaw for making 25, 28 or 32mm holes (or jigsaw)

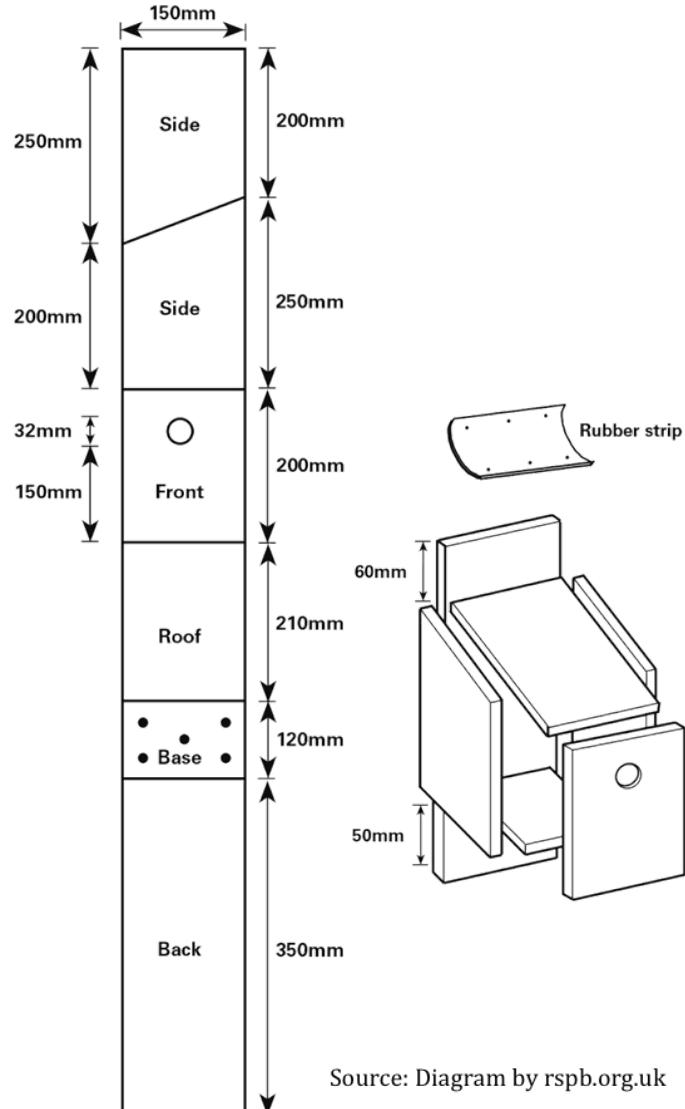
Making a nest box is loads of fun and can be very straightforward if you have the right tools and materials handy! It is possible to make your own bird house with what you can find around the garden and in the tool shed. For example repurposing an old plank of wood similar in dimensions to those above and scavenging some left over pond liner!

This project is made easier if you have access to a drill, holesaw cutters for the entrance hole and a staple gun. Fear not if you don't have all of these things as it can be done with a hammer and nails and a little extra effort.

If you don't have any way of making the entrance hole you can change the design of the nest box to an open fronted box which will be suitable for Robins, Pied Wagtails and Wrens instead. Simply remove the top half of the front panel to make an open fronted box.

When sourcing the wood for this project where possible it's great to use reclaimed timber. If you're buying wood specially for this bird box look for FSC certified wood that has been sourced responsibly. Avoid pressure treated wood as it will have been treated with toxic chemicals that can harm the birds. The box must be at least 10cm squared inside and thick enough to insulate the birds from cold and heat.

If you want to paint or preserve the finished nest box it is advisable to do this a few days or even weeks before putting it up so that any fumes are completely gone when the birds come to investigate the new real estate.



Source: Diagram by rsb.org.uk

Building the box

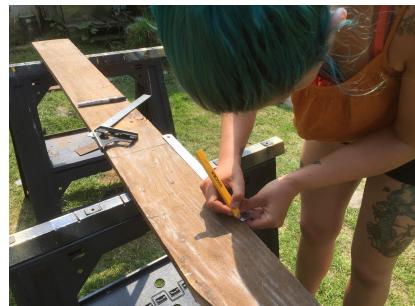
1. Use a ruler/tape measure and pencil to measure out the lengths shown in the diagram above. Be as precise as you can be with your measurements here as it will make it easier to slot together when it's time to assemble the box. If possible use a carpenter square to keep the edges straight.



2. Use the saw to cut out all of the sections. If possible wear safety gloves to protect the back of your hands when using a cutting tool and make sure you are cutting away from your legs and rest of the body. Use a saw horse or garden bench to cut the wood and ask for help to hold the wood still as you cut it.

3. Use the holesaw drill attachment (or a jigsaw to cut a square/wedge entrance) to drill the entrance hole 12.5cm above the floor. Make sure the panel is held tight or clamped before using the holesaw attachments as you need to use a fair amount of force to make this large hole.

You can drill 25mm, 28mm or 32mm holes for blue tits/coal tits/marsh tits, great tits/tree sparrows and nuthatches and house sparrows respectively.



4. Drill drainage holes into the base piece to stop the nest box from getting damp when it is in use.



5. Assemble the pieces of the nest box minus the roof. The back board, sides and front wrap around the base piece. If you are using a drill, pilot holes using a drill piece slightly smaller than the screws can help make it easier to assemble. Ensure hair is tied up and out of the way for drill use! Attach the side pieces to the backboard first, then the base and finally the front.



6. Measure out and attach a piece of rubber to use as a hinge for the roof. The rubber hinge will allow you inside to clean out the nest box in winter and will provide a bit of waterproofing for the top of the nest box. Used a staple gun and staples/ hammer and nails to attach the rubber hinge.



7. Attach a loop of rubber and two nails to the side of the nest box to hold it shut. This will stop squirrels and larger birds from getting inside.

Hanging the nest box

There are lots of guidelines available online for choosing the right location for your box. Put simply the box needs to be facing between North and East to avoid overheating and wet winds, or in a sheltered, shaded area. Make sure cats aren't able to climb and sit by the nest box and ensure it is at least 2m above the ground and has a clear flight path to the entrance. Conversely, If you made an open fronted box, Robins and Wrens prefer a lower nest box (under 2m) hidden in vegetation. If possible tilt the nest box slightly forward to allow rain to bounce off the roof.

If you are attaching the nest box to a house wall use a ladder, screws and rawl plugs to make sure the box is stable.

If you are attaching the nest box to a tree avoid attaching directly to the tree using screws or nails as it can damage the tree. A good way is to use a length of rubber (e.g. bicycle tyre inner or pond liner), which will stretch and expand as the tree grows. Used a staple gun or a hammer and nails to attach the rubber to the top of the backboard, wrap the rubber around the tree and attach to the backboard again as tightly as possible to prevent the box from moving.

Make sure someone is holding the ladder steady while you work at height.

Next enjoy the sight of local birds investigating your new bird house! Remember not to disturb the bird house during nesting season as it could cause its inhabitants to abandon it! If you want to follow the progress of nesting birds, nest cams can be bought and installed in winter before nesting starts.

