



Go Play Outside!

"WINTER BLUES"



Birds chirping and chicks hatching are things associated with warmer weather, but birds plan ahead! It's time to start thinking about putting up your bluebird box. Don't have a bluebird box? Don't know what a bluebird looks like? Read on to find out what you're missing. Putting up a bluebird box around your house is a great way for you and your family to get outside.

Why put up a bluebird box?

Bluebirds have historically nested in tree cavities that other birds leave behind. Through the mid-1900s, many of their natural nesting cavities disappeared as trees were cut down and wooden fenceposts removed. Bluebird boxes, sold at most hardware stores, garden centers and many other retail locations, provide a great place for bluebirds to live. Plus, it's a great way for you and your kids to get a close-up look at bluebird eggs and nestlings!

But won't we disturb them?

We've all heard our grandmother say that we shouldn't go near baby birds because the mother will smell us and abandon the nest. Grandma meant well, but she was wrong. Most birds don't have a good sense of smell. While you shouldn't handle the nestlings or bother the nest every five minutes, checking on the nest once a day won't put the birds at risk.



What kind of box should I get?

Get a box made specifically for bluebirds. It should be easy for you to open, but difficult for predators to get into. Many are built with one side that swivels open at the top and latches at the bottom. If you are very industrious, you can build your own bluebird box with your family. There are some building plans included at several of the links provided at the bottom of the page.

How do I check on the nest?

When checking the box, approach it from the side and tap gently on the side wall. This way, if the mother is inside she will fly out. Nobody wants a bird in the eye when they open their bluebird box! Open the front and peer in to check the nest for eggs or nestlings. Some bluebird boxes include a nest cup, which makes it easier to check on the nest since the entire cup can be removed.

Where should I put my bluebird box?

Bluebirds eat mostly insects, which they can find easily in open grassy areas. It's best to put up your bluebird box at the edge of a meadow or large lawn area with the opening facing this open area. Since male bluebirds are territorial, it is best not to put boxes within 100 yards of each other. Put the box at a height of about five feet where it's easy for you to monitor the box.

When will birds move in?

Bluebird couples generally start nest shopping in February in North Carolina, which is why it's good to get your box now. Nests can be established anytime between February and June. Females usually lay two and sometimes three groups of eggs (each group is called a clutch) each breeding season. The first clutch is usually laid in early April. Each clutch is made up of 2 to 6 light blue eggs. It takes 13-15 days for the eggs to hatch, and only two more weeks before the birds can leave the nest.

What should I do with the box when bluebirds aren't nesting?

Leave it up! The box might be used as shelter by other birds or even flying squirrels. You might want to clean out the inside of the box with a wire brush after your bluebirds are done nesting and again in early February when they again look for a nesting site. Some scientists, however, think that old bluebird nests might actually help the nestlings of the following year.

Where can I learn more about bluebirds?

There are several great resources out there for learning more about bluebirds and bluebird boxes. We have listed several below for you to check out. Good luck attracting bluebirds to your home.

[North Carolina Bluebird Society](http://www.ncbluebird.com/) <http://www.ncbluebird.com/>

[Bluebirds in North Carolina](http://www.carolinacountry.com/storypages/howtos/bluebirds/bluebirds.html) from *Carolina Country*

<http://www.carolinacountry.com/storypages/howtos/bluebirds/bluebirds.html>

Several articles from Hilton Pond Center:

[Time to Hang Those Bluebird Boxes](http://www.hiltonpond.org/ThisWeek010215.html) <http://www.hiltonpond.org/ThisWeek010215.html>

[Maintaining Bluebird Nest Boxes](http://www.hiltonpond.org/NestboxMaintenanceMain.html)

<http://www.hiltonpond.org/NestboxMaintenanceMain.html>

[More and More Bluebirds](http://www.hiltonpond.org/ThisWeek050608.html) <http://www.hiltonpond.org/ThisWeek050608.html>

[The Birdhouse Network](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse) from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse>

Have fun playing outside!

