



Wood duck nest boxes

Nest box maintenance: the key to success

It can take time for ducks to move into the nest box, but once birds begin using your boxes, there's a good chance they'll return in subsequent years. Research shows that maintained boxes have higher use and success than boxes that are never or rarely cleaned out. Maintenance involves cleaning out and replacing nesting material and checking the structural integrity of the box, pole and predator guard, yearly.

Note: It is also important to keep annual records of species use so that you can relocate unused boxes, if necessary.

If you don't have any ducks using your box over the summer, don't worry: Waterfowl biologists have seen waterfowl migrating in the fall scope out potential nesting sites for next spring. Another great reason to keep your boxes in tip-top shape.

This information has been compiled from the Nest Box Guide for Waterfowl by Ducks Unlimited and the Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada; a Conservator article (Vol. 19, No. 3) by Mearl Rooney and other Ducks Unlimited Canada resource materials.



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How to build, locate, install and care for your wood duck nest box

Why install wood duck boxes?

A great way to enhance the wildlife value and enjoyment of your wetlands is to install a wood duck nest box. Wood ducks are known as cavity nesters because they nest in the holes of trees made by woodpeckers, disease or lightning. Installing nest boxes in or around wetlands gives cavity nesters a helping hand and can provide you and your family with a source of enjoyment and education.

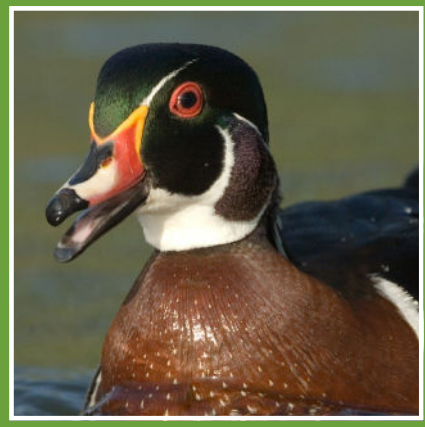
Things to know before getting started

Cavity nesting ducks do not carry nesting materials. It's important to help them out by placing four to six inches of wood shavings in the bottom of the box. You can find wood shavings at your local pet or farm supply store. **Do not use sawdust as it can suffocate ducklings.**

Nest box maintenance is a long-term commitment. People who install nest boxes also need to be committed to doing some regular housekeeping (see "Nest box maintenance: the key to success" on back).

Some tips for constructing your own nest box:

- 1 **Cedar is ideal:** White cedar lumber is recommended because it is naturally resistant to weather and insects. You can also use any materials you have available such as pine or exterior grade plywood.
- 2 **Finishing touches:** We do not recommend applying a finish to cedar boxes, however a finish might help to extend the life of a plywood box. If you decide to apply a finish to your nest box, use a non-toxic wood preserver or a light shade of an earth tone paint. The ducks will find your box by seeing the contrast in color caused by the entry hole. Do not apply finish inside the box.



Did you know?
Besides waterfowl, many other birds might inhabit your nest box, including screech owls, great crested flycatchers, European starlings, common grackles, tree swallows and American kestrels.



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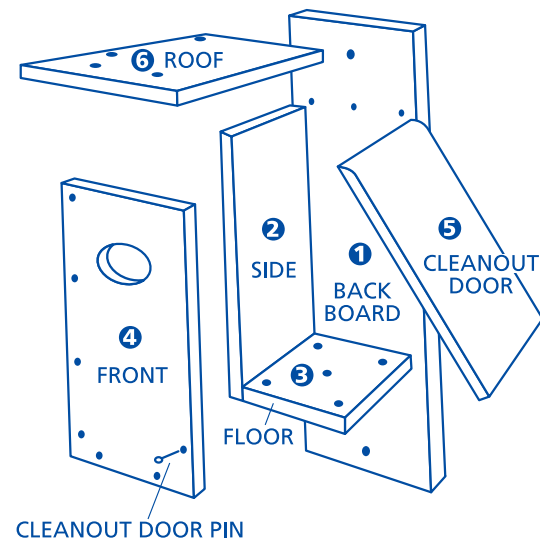
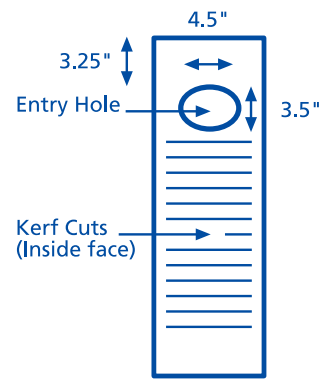
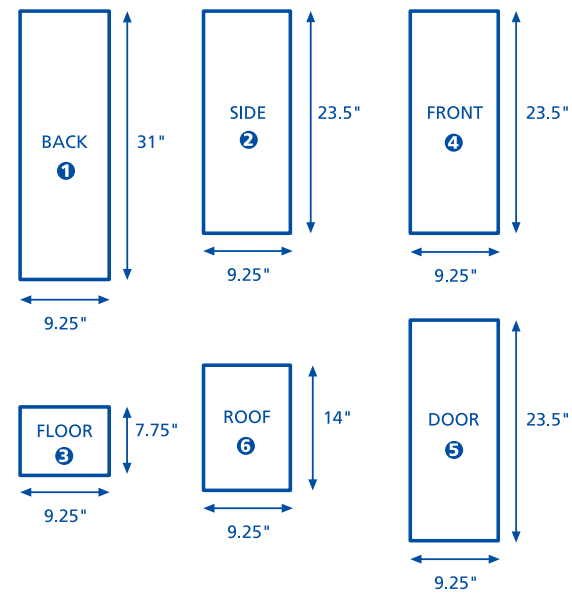
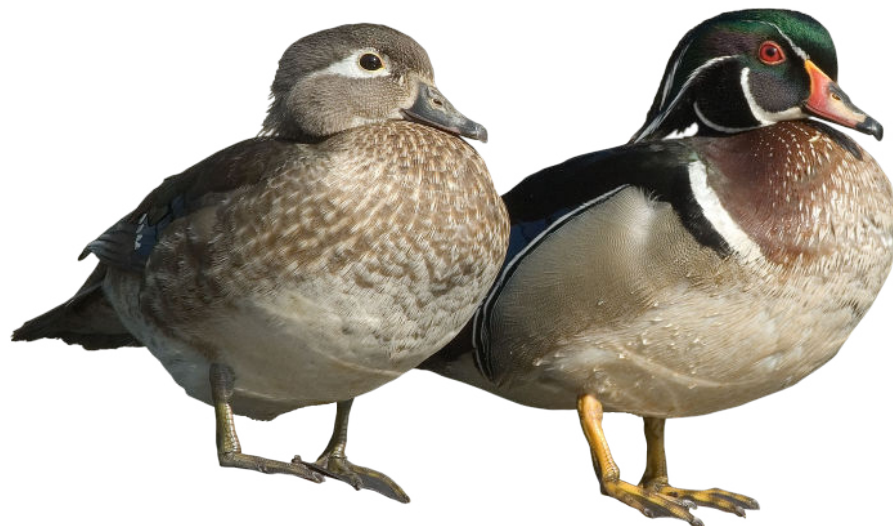
How do I build a wood duck nest box?

Tools required

- 1 Hand saw or table saw
- 2 Drill and 1/2" bit
- 3 Sandpaper
- 4 Measuring tape
- 5 Jigsaw
- 6 Screwdriver
- 7 Pencil
- 8 Straight edge

Steps in construction

- 1 Measure and cut your wood (10.5 linear feet of 3/4" lumber) to produce the six pieces as shown. Number accordingly.
- 2 Draw an entry hole on the front (see detailed view, below right) using a pencil (4 1/2" x 3 1/2" oval). Drill a pilot hole and cut the entry hole using a jigsaw.
- 3 Score the inside face of the front using a saw (right). The horizontal slots will provide footholds when the ducklings climb out.
- 4 Drill five 1/2" drainage holes in the floor (3) and around the top outside edge of the door (5). Attach the floor by fastening two screws through the back and two through the side.
- 5 Screw on the side, floor and door – then the front of the box (using coated deck screws).
- 6 Attach the roof, being careful not to screw into the door.
- 7 Finally, place 4-6" of wood shavings – **not sawdust** – into the box before installation.



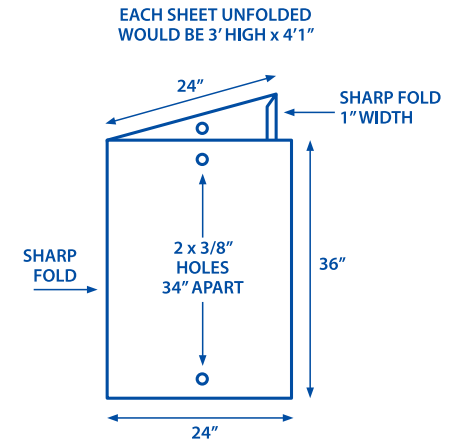
Predator guard

A predator guard will help to improve the chance of a successful hatch by keeping mink, opossums, squirrels or raccoons from disturbing the box.

Steel sheet sandwich guard

36" X 49" sheet of 28 gauge steel

- 1 Fold the sheet in half along the 49" length, creating a front and a back, each 24" wide
- 2 Along one 36" side, make a 1" fold towards the inside centre
- 3 Drill two holes, 34" apart (see diagram)
- 4 Place your guard so it surrounds the pole or tree trunk. Slip the unfolded side under the 1" fold. Using vice-grips, bend the corners in to lock these pieces and prevent the guard from opening.
- 5 **Pole mount:** bolt the guard into place about 2" below the nest box.
Tree mount: nail the guard in place – if the tree is alive, check the guard often to ensure tree growth hasn't popped the guard off.



Where should I install my nest box?

Now that you've completed construction of your nest box, you need to consider where to install it. Box location is the most important factor in determining the use and success for your nest boxes. But remember: be sure to place the box in a location that will be convenient for annual monitoring and maintenance.

Key features for your nest box site:

- 1 Put your nest box where you have seen wood duck or hooded merganser activity in the spring and summer.
- 2 Place in permanent wetlands at least one acre in size, or along slow flowing streams with wooded banks.
- 3 Place boxes no closer than 100 metres from each other, and ensure they are visually obscured from one another.
- 4 One nest box for every three acres is an acceptable amount of boxes that will ensure the greatest chance of nesting success.

While nest boxes can be installed at any time of the year, mid to late winter provides the best conditions for installation over water. Always ensure the ice is thick enough to support you!

Positioning

Nest boxes can be mounted on tree trunks, but steel poles are recommended for ease of maintenance and reduction of predation. If installed on a pole, place the nest box out from the wetland shoreline, facing open water in about 1 meter (2-3 ft.) of water; the nest box should stand 2-3 metres (6-9 ft.) over the water.

