

Wood Duck Nest Boxes

How to locate, install and care for your wood duck nest boxes?

Habitats for Healthy Waters-Fact Sheet #4

Why Install Wood Duck Boxes?

A great way to enhance the wildlife value and enjoyment of your wetland is to install a wood duck nest box. Wood ducks are known as cavity nesters because they nest in holes in trees made by woodpeckers, disease or lightning. Human impacts on the forest have reduced the availability of suitable trees, thereby limiting cavity nesting sites for wood ducks and other cavity nesting species. You can give nature a helping hand by installing one or more nest boxes on your wetland, if you have a suitable site. Some other cavity nesting birds that will use your nest box include, hooded mergansers, tree swallows, great crested flycatchers and screech owls.



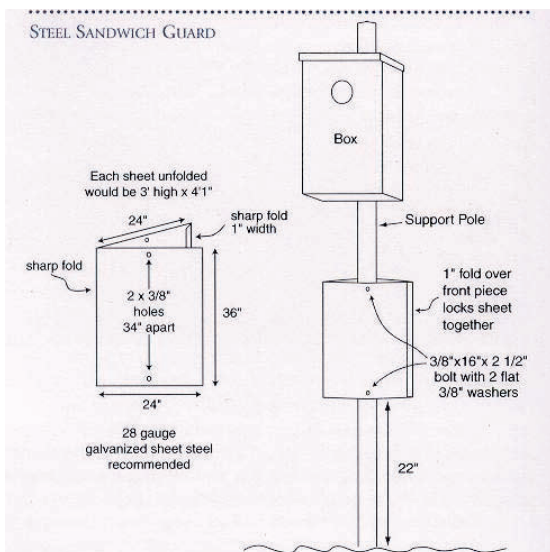
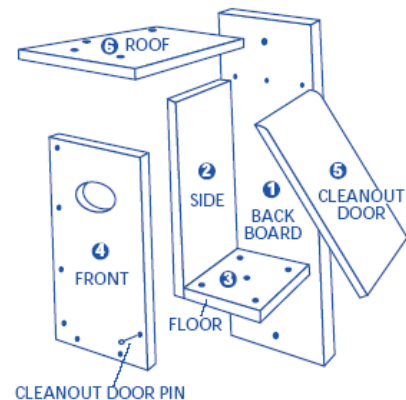
The wood duck will nest in natural or artificial cavities.

How Do I Build a Wood Duck Nest Box?

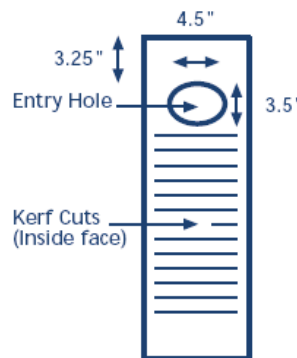
Tools Required: Handsaw or table saw, drill and 1/2" bit, jigsaw, screwdriver, sandpaper, pencil, measuring tape and straight-edge.

1. Using 10.5 linear feet of lumber (3/4 " thick), cut the six pieces pictured at right. Cedar is naturally weather resistant but you can use pine or plywood.
2. Cut out a hole in the front board as pictured below and score the inside face. Also, drill five 1/2" drainage holes in the floor and round the top outside edge of the door.
3. Screw on the side, floor, door then the front of the box. See "exploded view".
4. Attach roof being careful not to screw into the door.
5. Don't forget to put 4-6" of wood shavings (**not sawdust!**) into the box before installation.

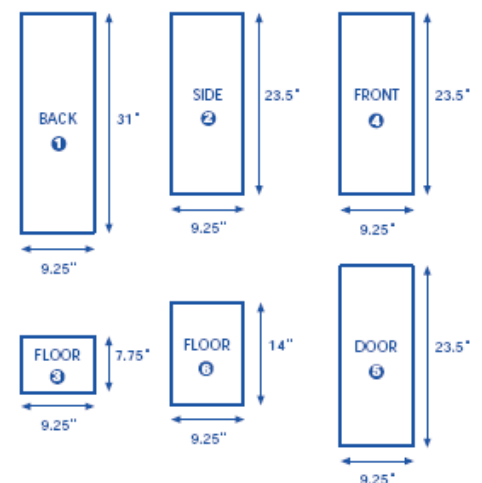
EXPLODED VIEW - not to scale



Use a steel sheet or cone predator guard to prevent predation by mink or raccoons.



MATERIAL MEASUREMENTS - not to scale



Where Should I Install My Nest Box?



Wetlands like this beaver pond are optimal wood duck breeding habitat.

with wooded banks

- For best results, install your nest box 2– 3 metres over the water on a pole with a predator guard (see right). This reduces predation on your box and increases the survival rate for the ducklings. If you have to place your nest box on a dead tree, wrap the trunk with tin or plastic to deter hungry raccoons.
- 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!
- Boxes should be placed near the shoreline and facing out to open water where they can be seen by waterfowl on the water.
- Place boxes no closer than 100 metres from each other and always keep them visually obscured from one another.
- For wetlands less than 10 acres (4 ha), one nest box per acre is acceptable. Larger wetlands require lower densities (1 box/3acres). It's always better to start with a low number of boxes then install more once most are occupied.

If you want wood ducks to use your nest box, you must place it in a wetland that is already attracting wood ducks. Box location is the most important factor in determining the use and success of your nest boxes. The best candidate wetlands for installing wood duck boxes are generally shallow (1 metre or less deep) with flooded trees or shrubs in and around the basin. Forest or shrub cover around the edge of a wetland or river also attracts wood ducks.

Key Features for Identifying Suitable Nest Box Sites:

- Where you see wood ducks in the spring
- Wetlands that are permanently flooded
- Flooded live or dead trees in and/or around the wetland
- One acre in size or larger
- Along permanently flowing rivers or streams



Place your nest box over water with a predator guard for best results. A good back drop of trees or shrubs increases use by wood ducks.

Nest Box Maintenance – The Key to Success

Once birds begin using your boxes, there's a good chance they'll return in subsequent years. Your nest boxes should be cleaned and maintained every year. 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. Late winter, when the ice is still thick enough to support you, is the best time to maintain boxes over water. Many people enjoy the opportunity to identify nesting species by unhatched eggs, shell fragments or nesting material. Don't worry if your boxes aren't used right away. It may take 2-3 years before somebody decides to move into your box.

(picture)

The "Habitats for Healthy Waters" program is a three-year (2005-2007) initiative to raise the awareness of wetland values among residents of Elgin, Oxford and Middlesex Counties. This project will also help landowners implement wetland stewardship practices that provide benefits to agriculture and the rural community through a series of demonstration sites, workshops and educational material.

Other sources of information:

- Ducks Unlimited Canada: "Nest Box Guide for Waterfowl"
- Ducks Unlimited Canada Website : www.ducks.ca/resource/general/wetland/pdf/duckbox.pdf

For more information on wetlands or "Habitats for Healthy Waters", please contact:

David McLachlin
C/o Ducks Unlimited Canada
(705)721-4444 x 237
Email: d_mclachlin@ducks.ca

Ontario Stewardship

Elgin Co.	Mark Emery:	mark.emery@mnr.gov.on.ca	519-773-4739
Oxford Co.	Dave Depuydt:	dave.depuydt@mnr.gov.on.ca	519-773-4704
Middlesex Co.	Nathan Kirby:	nathan.kirby@mnr.gov.on.ca	519-773-4751
Chatham/Kent	Don Hector:	don.hector@mnr.gov.on.ca	519-354-6274
Essex Co.	Brett Groves:	brett.groves@mnr.gov.on.ca	519-354-4437

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