



Nesting Boxes for Bluebirds
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UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

I love having nesting boxes for Western Bluebirds. They are not shy birds -- you can place a box near your garden or around your home. They are bug-eaters so having them near the garden is a good thing.

Birds are picky creatures. They like their nesting sites just right. Cavity nesters, such as Western Bluebirds, require a specific hole-size for entering their nest and also a specific cavity size. That is why it is important to build nesting boxes designed specifically for bluebirds. Buying a pretty birdhouse at the store may not work at all unless you know how to shop with bluebird specifications in mind. Speaking of pretty store-bought birdhouses, paint and stains are not recommended on birdhouses because they may be toxic to birds. If you do buy a fancy nesting box, consider buying it from a store or website that specializes in wild bird products. I build bluebird nest boxes and the birds seem to like them just fine. They are a simple design, easy to build and easy to clean out each year. The only modification I made was to use a screw in place of a double-headed nail to keep the door closed. Here is your reference site:
https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs144p2_063895.pdf

Once you have your nest boxes built, you need to find a good place to hang them. Make sure you install them well before nesting season. You need to give the birds time to find them and to scope them out to make sure the box is perfect. Install them no later than February in El Dorado County. You can hang them from a pole or a tree. Do not be discouraged if all boxes are not occupied. You might even have to change the location of a box if it is not used after a couple of seasons. It may not be in the perfect spot.

Western Bluebirds are a type of flycatcher and like open spaces. Install your boxes facing east into an open field or meadow. Some shade is desirable. I try to place my box so there is a branch that hangs near the hole. Bluebirds can, and will, fly directly into the hole, though. My observation is that bluebirds like to fly nearby, land on a branch near the nest box hole, and then fly into the box. Flying from a branch is like having a porch in front of your own door. It's just

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more convenient for a variety of reasons. If you have multiple boxes, place them at least 200 feet apart.

In late fall, open the boxes and clean them out. Remove old nesting material, spiders and webs, and other debris. Sometimes, wasps build nests in the boxes so you will need to remove the old abandoned wasp nests, too.

Tools you will need are gloves to remove old nesting material and to protect your hands from bugs, a screwdriver to open the side panel, and a wire brush to clean out spider webs, old wasp nests and other debris. You can use a hammer to gently bang the nails back into place. I use tie wraps (aka zip ties) to attach my box to the tree. Be sure to use commercial grade UV resistant ties. I like tie-wraps because they will break instead of girdling the tree like wire or rope might.

I once noticed a small group of five or six Western Bluebirds entering a box in late fall, well after nesting season was over. It was odd that a group of them were going in and out. I did some reading and learned that small groups may overwinter in bird boxes to keep warm in winter. I had a House Wren nest in one box, too. In winter, a Downy Woodpecker likes to spend the night in one of the boxes. It does not nest in the box, though. Once nesting season arrives, a woodpecker will find or excavate the perfect spot in a real tree.

Enjoy observing the bluebirds. You will find them endlessly entertaining!

Second Saturday Open Garden: Come out to Sherwood Demonstration Garden and see what winter plants are showing off! Get your winter gardening questions answered by Master Gardener docents, and feel free to just look around on your own. \$2.00 parking fee. CLOSED IF 60% CHANCE OF RAIN. February 15, 2020 9:00-12:00PM Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive, Placerville. (The Garden is behind the Placerville campus of Folsom Lake College)

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu> . Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512, or send us an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. We also encourage you to visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. See http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information and days and hours of operation, or call us to schedule a tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram; we hope you enjoy our postings and will share them with your friends.