

Making Gourd Birdhouses

Old decaying trees make the best homes for birds. But gourd birdhouses are a fun and pretty way to increase the available nesting cavities for native birds. Birdhouses hung in early spring are more likely to attract a bird family than those hung later in the season.

Birds prefer entrance holes that fit around them closely and are too small to let in predator birds.

Here are the entrance hole sizes preferred by some New England birds, followed by how high the birdhouse should be hung.

Nuthatch	1 to 1-1/4"	6 to 15 feet up
Chickadee	1-1/8"	6 to 15 feet up
Titmouse	1-1/4"	6 to 15 feet up
Bluebird	1-1/2"	5 to 10 feet up
Swallow	1-1/2"	10 to 15 feet up
Flicker	2-1/2"	6 to 20 feet up

Entrance holes can be drilled with hole saw bits purchased from a hardware store. The bits usually come in sets of different sizes and fit electric drills. The curved and slick surface of gourds makes drilling entrance holes a job for grown-ups!

You'll also need to drill smaller drainage holes at the bottom and hanger holes at the top.

Don't add a perch outside the entrance hole. Perches help predator birds raid nests.

**Gourd Dust is Harmful to Your Lungs.
Work in a well-ventilated area.
Wear a breathing mask or respirator.**

After drilling the entrance hole, you'll need to clean out the dried pith inside the gourd. Because of the dust and dried mold inside cured gourds, a grown-up should get most of the matter out before letting children help. Use a bent wire coat hanger to clean the inside. You can also fill the gourd with some pebbles and water and shake to clean out the inside. Let the gourd dry completely before decorating.

Before decorating, sand any undesired bumps and fill small holes and bug-bites with wood fill. Gourds can be decorated by wood burning (in a well-ventilated area). They can be stained with gourd or leather dyes, or painted with acrylic craft paints. If painting a gourd, it's best to seal the gourd first with a coat of acrylic primer. Finish a gourd with a protective outdoor varnish before hanging with cord or monofilament fishing line.

RachelArmington.com/ThePaintedGourd.com