

Natural nesting sites:

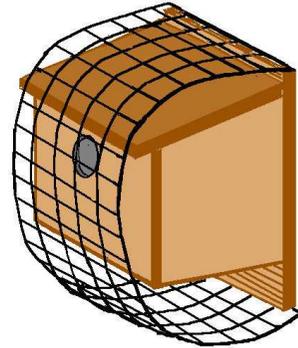
Leave a space of 10cm between your climber's support wires or trellis and the wall or fence: this will create hiding places for birds to nest and roost.

A tall, thick hedge with sloping sides, so that it is wider at the base and narrower at the top, provides the best structure for birds to nest in. A group of trees at the bottom of the garden could be used to create a woodland edge habitat within your garden and encourage more birds to nest and frequent your garden.

You can encourage some species of bird to nest by providing them with nest boxes. A wide variety of nest boxes, suitable for many different species, are available commercially, or, of course, you can make your own.

Magpies, Grey Squirrels and cats will take birds from nest boxes. It is, therefore, quite a good idea to protect the occupants of your box(es) by fixing a shield, made from plastic fencing, over the box as shown here.

Leave dead plant material, twigs and moss for birds to use for their nests. Birds will also make use of small feathers, animal (or human!) hair, and strands of knitting wool.



Wycombe Wildlife Group

Among its activities Wycombe Wildlife Group surveys and promotes the management of wild habitats for the benefit of wildlife and advises on and promotes wildlife gardening.

Information about the Group can be obtained from the Group's web site at: www.wycombewildlife.org.uk

Gardens for Birds

Trees and hedgerows are important habitats for birds, and many rely on gardens for nesting places and a source of natural foods. Every garden, however small, can help to provide these habitats and so improve birds' chances of survival.

Watching the birds visiting your garden can become a fascinating armchair hobby. You can observe them disposing of your aphids and slugs, saving you the need to buy and use pesticides.

You can attract birds all the year round by providing food, water, shelter and nesting sites. You will have resident birds as well as summer & winter visitors. The supplementary food you put out in winter may attract some unusual birds. To attract as many



different birds as possible, provide plenty of variety and choice; even birds of the same species may have different preferences. Have as many of the following features in your garden as its size permits.

Water is important to birds for drinking and keeping their feathers in good order. Provide a birdbath. A 25 -35cm plant pot saucer will make a good one, or have a pond with a shallow area where birds can drink and bathe safely. A pond will also attract other creatures and provide additional food.

Whatever you use, the water for the birds' use should only be 2-3cm deep. Do keep bird baths topped up in hot, dry weather, and empty them and refill with fresh water regularly. In winter an upturned metal dustbin lid on bricks, filled with water and with a night light beneath, to prevent the water freezing, will provide birds with an essential source of water in the cold weather. Site your bird bath in a sunny spot where you can see it from the house.



Lawns and other short grass will attract Blackbirds, Song Thrushes and Starlings that will dig for worms and grubs. A large area of grass may attract a Green Woodpecker, which likes ants.

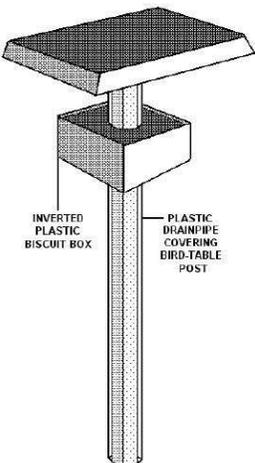
Long grass, especially if it contains plants such as Thistles and Knapweeds, will provide plenty of insects, grubs and seeds.

Flower borders can provide valuable seed plants such as Forget-me-nots, Antirrhinums, Michaelmas-daisies and Canadian Goldenrod. Leave the seed heads all winter: Greenfinches, Nuthatches and tits love Sunflower seeds, and Goldfinches find Teasel seeds irresistible. Insects will hibernate among the dead stalks, providing extra protein for the birds when it is scarce.

Fruit and berry-bearing trees and shrubs such as Hawthorn, Elder, Holly, Rowan, Dogwood, Crab Apple, Wild Cherry, Cotoneasters and Barberry will attract many birds in winter. All trees and shrubs are useful, but native ones will support insect life as well. Redwings and Fieldfares may come into your garden to feast on berries in winter and, if lucky, you might see a Waxwing on your Cotoneasters or Firethorn in a really severe winter.

Woodpiles and rockeries provide places where birds such as the Wren and Robin will search and find insects, and may even nest.

Leaf litter: Do leave a layer of leaves under the hedges around your garden. This will not only provide an ideal, natural place for beneficial insects, such as ladybirds and lacewings, to hibernate over winter, but will also provide a food source for Blackbirds during the winter.



Bird feeders: You can supplement the natural foods available in your garden by providing a mixture of seeds, peanuts and fats in your feeders, and invertebrates, live, or dried, on your bird table. If kept topped up they will attract a great variety of birds to your garden.

Try to provide bird food all year round, adding extra amounts in late spring, when mortality rates are high and natural foods for both adults and nestlings may be scarce.

Site your feeding station within about 6m of cover to protect your visitors from predators - Sparrowhawks will take small birds from a bird table sited in an open area! However, make sure it is at least 2m from trees or other vantage points from which cats could spring. To prevent cats climbing up on to a bird table, cover the pole with a length of plastic drainpipe or water pipe. An inverted plastic biscuit box will be an added deterrent for cats attempting to get up on the bird table (see illustration opposite).

A variety of bird feeders, and the foods to put in them, are on sale at garden centres. You can hang feeders on the bird table, on suitable branches of a tree or from a bracket on a wall or fence. As with the bird table, try to site these so cats can not get at them. If you get Grey Squirrels in your garden, consider the various "squirrel proof" nut feeders which, to varying degrees, will stop Grey Squirrels raiding them.



Some birds, such as House Sparrows, prefer to feed on the ground. They will take the seed that other birds drop from hanging feeders but they will fare better if you scatter seed on the ground for them.

A small square or round paving stone sunk in the grass, so you can run the mower over it without damaging the blades, makes an ideal feeding platform. Site it well clear of vegetation where cats could lurk, and occasionally brush clean with a stiff broom.

Cleanliness is important, both for the health of the birds and for you and your family. If you can, cover the surface of the bird table with an offcut of Formica or similar plastic sheeting as this will make it easy to clean. Wash it down regularly and at the same time scrub any feeders you have. A diluted solution of bleach is the best thing to use, as it is an effective "disinfectant" and will leave no lasting residues to affect the birds. In damp weather, watch out for mouldy peanuts and fats and discard them.

You should **always wear rubber gloves and wash your hands** after filling the bird feeders or attending to nest boxes.