

Flora & Fauna

Build A Nest Box for Birds

Nest boxes are important conservation tools. Even though there are hundreds of species of birds in North America, only about 85 of them nest in cavities. Even so, there is so much competition for natural holes in tree trunks, that man-made nest boxes are appreciated by many species, especially bluebirds, wrens, wood ducks, titmice, and chickadees.

Your library is a superb source of blueprints for many types of nest boxes. In addition, your state wildlife department may offer free, or inexpensive waxed cardboard bluebird boxes that only require folding and mounting.

Some points to keep in mind that are not always mentioned in the blueprints for birdhouses are:

- Always use **untreated** lumber at least 3/4" thick such as cedar, pine, and exterior plywood. This helps insulate the birds from cold and heat.
- Leave the wood **unpainted**. If you really must paint, use certified non-toxic paint, and keep colors muted to blend in with the surrounding leaves and tree barks. Use light shades to reflect heat and sunlight so you don't turn your box into an oven.
- Glue deteriorates, and nails rust and work their way out of shrinking and warping wood. Use "galvanized screws" instead.
- The box should have a hinged front or side wall that lets you easily remove old nests at the end of the season. Old nests may contain parasites and disease-causing bacteria that will contaminate new nests. Some birds will avoid a box with an old nest inside. At the end of the season, clean the inside with a solution of 1/4 cup chlorine bleach and 2 cups of water.
- The entrance wall can be scored on the **inside** with ridges to give the birds a "ladder" to walk up to the hole.
- Do not place a perching stick in front of the hole. The birds do not need it, and it makes it easier for birds that rob other birds' nests to gain entrance.
- The box should have a roof line which hangs out over the entrance hole to hamper invaders and protect the birds inside from driving rains.
- The roof should also have ventilation openings near the top. These can be holes drilled on the sides near the roof, or you can leave a slight gap between the top of the walls and the roof boards.
- Spread a thin layer of petroleum jelly along the inside of the roof to keep wasps and bees from nesting in the box.
- The floor's edges should be covered by the wall boards, and you should drill drainage holes, at least one in each corner, in case rain does get in.
- Mount your nest boxes away from easy access by predators. The best way is to mount them on a pole with a "baffle," a sheet metal skirt or tube below the box on the pole. Many plans can be found in bird books.

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Cleaning Corner **Cleaning Up Oil Stains**

Oil stains can ruin your driveway or garage floor, and even detract from the value of your home. If you act quickly on fresh spills, you can clean up the mess before it becomes problematic. However, if you wait too long, you may need to call in a professional to give the surface an intense power wash.

- **Oil Stain Solution #1: Kitty Litter**
Kitty litter works wonders on oil stains. (It's also a good idea to keep a small jug of kitty litter in your trunk in the winter. You can use it to give your tires traction if you get stuck in an icy parking lot.) Simply spread the litter on the oil, wait until it discolors, then sweep it away. Continue to add litter and sweep it away until the oil disappears.
- **Oil Stain Solution #2: Portland Cement**
As Portland Cement is brushed over the stain, the powdery cement will ball up as it gathers oil. When this happens, simply sweep the debris away and repeat the process with fresh powder. You can find Portland Cement at your local hardware store.

June

- 780 B.C. The first reliably recorded total solar eclipse occurs in China
- 1215 A.D. King John of England signs the Magna Carta at Runnymede, a 63-part document of human rights that became the foundation of the English legal system.
- 1533 Anne Boleyn is crowned queen
- 1786 The first commercially made ice cream is sold in New York
- 1860 The US Secret Service is created
- 1929 The first color TV makes its debut in New York
- 2007 Bob Barker's final episode as host of *The Price is Right* aired

Health Tips: Health Advice: Lifting? Watch Your Back

It seems harmless. You bend over, pick up a heavy box and hoist it to a high shelf. But, then you pay for it. Your back hurts for days – maybe even for weeks. Back pain is one of the most common health complaints. However, many sore backs could be prevented with proper lifting techniques.

Put Brains Before Brawn

The first step to safe lifting is to think it through. Decide where you'll place the load and make sure the path is clear. Then, push the item lightly with your hands or feet to see how easily it moves, even if it's small. If it seems too heavy, divide it into smaller portions or get help. Also, make sure that containers are packed correctly so the weight doesn't shift while you're carrying them. If everything looks and feels good:

- **Get Close.** Stand as close as you can, and then squat down so the object is between your knees.
- **Power Up Your Legs.** Keeping your back straight, grip the bottom of the object and push yourself up with your leg muscles. It helps to tighten your abdominal muscles as you rise.
- **Balance the Load.** You'll put less strain on your back muscles if you carry the object close to your body between your shoulders and your waist.
- **Don't Do the Twist.** If you need to turn while lifting, step around instead of twisting your body.
- **Avoid Surprises.** If you're working with another person to lift an item, talk first about how you'll do it. You don't want sudden movements.
- **Be A Climber.** Use a ladder or step stool to retrieve or place items above your head. Reaching could make you arch your back, which can cause injury.
- **Don't Count on a Back Belt.** Studies show that back belts do not protect you from back injuries. While they may offer support, they are not effective in preventing injuries.

How to Care for a Sore Back.

If you strain your back, there's good news. Most back pain goes away quickly and completely. The best position for relief when your back hurts is to lie on your back on the floor with your knees bent. You can also pull a chair close and rest your feet and knees on the seat. This takes the pressure and weight off your back. You may need 1 to 2 days of this sort of rest for a hurt back. Resting longer than this can cause your muscles to weaken, which can slow your recovery. Even if it hurts, walk around for a few minutes every hour. Heating pads, ice packs, and gentle massage can also relax muscles and alleviate pain. Of course, if the pain persists for more than 2 days, seek medical attention.

Kid Corner: Six Ways to Overcome a Picky Eater

Most kids are picky eaters. If left to their own devices, they might never eat anything besides ice cream, chocolate, pizza and chicken nuggets. Sadly, for some children, that's exactly what is happening. Many parents feel that it is their job to simply make sure their child eats *something*, so they allow their child to have Pop-Tarts® for dinner because they're under the impression that it's better than no dinner at all. However, with childhood obesity and diabetes on the rise, parents need to take control of their child's diet and make an active effort to expose their finicky eater to a more varied and healthful diet. Here are six simple ways this seemingly monumental challenge can be accomplished.

- **Keep Kids in the Kitchen.** Many parents feel that the kitchen is a dangerous place for their child. They don't want their little one around a hot stove, sharp knives, or boiling water. However, studies have shown that children who participate in making dinner (such as tossing a salad or adding salt and pepper to a dish) are more excited to try foods on the menu (and even ask for seconds) than those who simply have a plate put before them.
- **Encourage, Don't Pressure.** Many parents make the mistake of forcing their child to "have just one bite" before they can leave the table. Kids are like adults - when pressured to do something, they're less likely to enjoy doing it. So instead of saying, "Eat your vegetables and you can watch TV," show your child how much you enjoy eating vegetables and tell them you hope they'll enjoy it as much as you do. Don't offer praise when they try it and don't be discouraged if they don't.
- **Don't Hide the "Good Stuff."** Some parents keep the cookies and sweet snacks out of reach on a high shelf where kids can't get them. But by making a food forbidden, the child only wants it more and is more likely to binge once they get it. Instead, *don't* buy cookies, chips and candy. Keep healthy foods around and available for kids to grab for a snack. They'll naturally choose to eat healthy and won't be obsessed with "the good stuff" that you keep hidden away.
- **Practice What You Preach.** This should go without saying. If you tell your child to eat healthy, you need to eat healthy. Model good eating behavior by choosing healthy foods and not restricting your own diet. Parents who diet in front of their children, or constantly talk about their weight issues, actually promote eating disorders in their kids.
- **Serve Exciting Foods.** Try venturing beyond boring, steamed vegetables like green beans, peas, and carrots. Experiment with peppers, radishes, zucchini, spinach, mushrooms, broccoli, and squash. Don't be afraid to add a little butter or cheese sauce to entice your child to eat them, either.
- **Don't Give Up!** Many parents automatically say, "My kid would never eat that," when a new food suggestion is made. While that may be true, eating preferences change over time. So keep putting healthful foods in front of them. Try bridging their tastes, too. If your child enjoys pumpkin pie, try serving mashed sweet potatoes. Exposure is what matters most.

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 medium zucchini, cut into thin strips lengthwise
- 1/2 bell pepper, seeded and cut into thin strips lengthwise
- Dash of chili sauce
- 4 flour tortillas
- 1 15-oz can of enchilada sauce
- 1 cup grated Monterey Jack or cheddar cheese

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. In a skillet on high heat, heat the olive oil for 1 minute. Add the garlic, zucchini, bell pepper, and chili powder. Cook for 4 minutes, or until the vegetables are lightly browned.
3. Lay the tortillas flat and spread the vegetables on one side, then roll up.
4. In an oiled baking dish, lay tortillas side by side. Pour enchilada sauce over evenly and top with cheese. Bake for 20 minutes, or until cheese is bubbly.

A Brief History of the Enchilada

It is believed that the enchilada was created in Mexico by the ancient Mayan people. Anthropological evidence suggests that the indigenous people ate corn tortillas folded or rolled around small fish. In fact, the word “enchilada” comes from the Spanish word “enchilar” which means to “add chili pepper to.” In the 19th Century, enchiladas were mentioned in the first Mexican cookbook, *El Cocinero Mexicano* (“The Mexican Chef”), published in 1831. Today, countless varieties of enchiladas are sold around the world.

Tips for Road Trips with Pets

Bringing the family pet along on a road trip may seem like a good idea. After all, you don’t have to ask friends or family to look after your pet and you can avoid the costs and concerns that go with boarding and kennels. But traveling with pets in the car also brings special challenges that, fortunately, can be overcome with a bit of forethought and careful preparation of both the vehicle and pet.

When bringing your pet along on a road trip, your pet’s health, happiness, and safety – the same things you take into consideration at home – should be thoughtfully addressed when traveling. Here are some helpful tips for road tripping with your pet.

1. If your pet is not accustomed to car travel, take it for a few short rides before your trip so it will feel confident that a car outing does not necessarily mean a trip to the vet or an unpleasant destination.
2. Cats should always be confined to a cage or cat carrier. This allows them to feel secure, and it prevents them from crawling under your feet while driving.
3. Dogs riding in a car should not ride in the passenger seat if it is equipped with an airbag, and should never be allowed to sit on the driver’s lap.
4. Pets should not be allowed to ride with their heads outside car windows. Particles of dirt, bug, and other debris can enter the eyes, ears, and nose, causing injury or infection.
5. Give small portions of food and water before and during travel if on an extended trip. Plan to stop every two hours for exercise. Remember to include a leash with your pet’s traveling supplies.
6. If your pet has a problem with car sickness, your vet can prescribe medication that will help the animal feel more comfortable during a long trip.
7. Pack a simple pet first-aid kit that includes items such as bandages, antiseptic cream, an anti-diarrhea medication (that has been approved by your vet), gauze squares, and phone numbers for your vet, a 24-hour emergency animal hospital, and the national poison-control hotline.
8. In addition to a standard ID tag with your address and phone number on it, give your pet a travel tag that has your travel address and cell phone on it, in case he gets lost.

... Carpet Talk...

The best way to keep your carpets cleaner longer is to vacuum on a regular basis. Particles of dry soil get tracked in to your home on shoes, clothing and even gentle summer breezes through open windows. If not removed, they’ll settle deep into the pile of the carpet, actually damaging the fibers and making it look dull, dingy, and dirty!

To do all you can to keep your carpet fresh and looking new, keep these tips in mind:

- 1) **Go the extra mile when shopping for a vacuum.** Cheap vacuums don’t reach down deep into the carpet fibers, so a great deal of soil is left to accumulate deep down.
- 2) **Use the correct vacuum tools to care for your floor covering.** Thick, loop pile, if brushed the wrong way, can shorten a carpet’s life. Combination beater/brush bars agitate pile and loosen it down deep for removal.
- 3) **Opt for a paper bag.** Many vacuums today offer bagless technology, which is downright convenient when it comes to disposing the dirt you’ve trapped. However, paper bags that trap particles smaller than two microns in size tend to do a more efficient job. Don’t forget to replace bags when they’re between one-half to two-thirds full for maximum efficiency.
- 4) **Get the height right.** If your vacuum has an adjustable height mechanism, start at the highest setting then lower it until it just touches the pile. Your vacuum should slightly vibrate carpet. If the brush is set too low, you’ll wind up overworking the motor and possibly needing to purchase a replacement vacuum sooner than expected.



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Inside this issue you'll find:

- Build a Nest Box for Birds
- Cleaning Corner: Cleaning Oil Stains
- Health Advice: Lifting? Watch Your Back
- Kid Corner: Six Ways to Overcome a Picky Eater
- Recipe: Zucchini Enchiladas
- Tips for Road Trips with Pets
- Carpet Talk
- June Money-Saving Special

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