✦ *The GreenLife Project* ✦

Winter Roost Boxes

One board. A few screws. A warm place for the birds to sleep through the longest nights.

What Is a Roost Box?

A winter shelter, not a nest box. Birds sleep in it on cold nights. The door sits low and there are no vents, so the warmth the birds give off rises and stays trapped at the top.

Why It Works

A chickadee can burn nearly all the fat it gained in a day just keeping warm overnight. Staggered perches let several birds huddle and share their heat, so more of them make it to morning.

Who Uses It

Black-capped and chestnut-backed chickadees, plus nuthatches and wrens. The 1-1/8" door lets them in and keeps out house sparrows and starlings.

Chickadee Roost Box

Makes 1 box · One 8-foot 1x8 pine or cedar board · An afternoon to build

CUT LIST (1x8 IS ACTUALLY 3/4" x 7-1/4")

- Back: 7-1/4" x 25"
- Side A (fixed): 17" back edge, 16" front edge
- Side B (opens): 16-3/4" back, 15-3/4" front
- Front: 7-1/4" x 16"
- Roof: 7-1/4" x 10"
- Floor: 5-3/4" x 7-1/4", corners clipped
- Perches: seven 3" pieces of 3/8" dowel

TOOLS & SUPPLIES

- Saw, square, pencil and tape measure
- Drill, 1-1/8" hole saw or spade bit, 3/8" bit
- 1-1/4" exterior screws (about 20)
- Outdoor wood glue and sandpaper
- Safety glasses for everyone
- Optional: light exterior latex paint
  - *untreated wood only, never pressure-treated*

1 Cut and angle the pieces
Cut the board per the list and label each piece. Angle the tops of both sides from back to front. Trim 1/4" off Side B so it can swing open.

2 Make the floor and ladder
Rip the floor to 5-3/4" and clip each corner about 3/8" for drainage. On the inside of the front and back, saw shallow grooves 1/2" apart so birds can climb.

3 Drill the door low
Center a 1-1/8" hole on the front, 2-1/2" up from the bottom edge to the center of the hole. Sand the edges smooth.

4 Add the perches
Drill 3/8" holes 1/4" deep on the inside of each side, staggered up the wall. Glue in seven 3" dowels and let them set.

5 Assemble the box
Screw Side A to the back, its bottom 4" up from the back's bottom edge. Set the floor 1/4" up between the sides. Screw on the front with the door at the bottom.

6 Hang the swing-open side
Fit Side B. About 1" from the top, drive one screw through the front and one through the back, straight across. They're the hinge. One screw holds the bottom closed.

7 Roof and finish
Screw the roof tight against the back, overhanging the front (not into Side B). Paint only the outside, in a light color, and let it air out a week. No vent holes.

8 Hang it before the cold
On a post, pole or tree, 5 to 15 feet up, out of the winter wind, facing south if you can. A baffle on a pole stops climbing predators.

The Door Rule

1-1/8" & down low

Low door = warm air stays in.
1-1/8" = chickadees yes, sparrows no.
Never add vents to a roost box.

Kid Builders · Schoolhouse Earth

Grown-ups: *all sawing and drilling*
Kids can: *measure, mark, sand, glue perches, drive screws with help*
After: *keep a winter bird journal*

Keep It Going

- Clean once a year in late spring: swing Side B open and brush it out
- Add a feeder nearby, filled all winter
- Next: build the screech-owl box (page 2)

Sources: Cornell Lab of Ornithology, "Attract Birds With Roost Boxes"; Cornell NestWatch.

✦ *The GreenLife Project* ✦

Winter Roost Boxes

A winter hideaway now. Maybe a nursery by spring.

What Is It?

A copy of the old woodpecker holes that screech-owls nap in by day. The door is high on the front, there are no perches, and a bed of wood chips on the floor becomes the nest.

Why It Works

Screech-owls can't dig their own holes, and old trees with cavities are hard to find in most yards. A well-placed box gives them a safe daytime roost, and a place to raise young in spring.

Who Uses It

Western screech-owls here in the Northwest. Eastern screech-owls use the same box in the East and in Florida. One box per yard: pairs keep big territories.

Screech-Owl Box

Makes 1 box · One 8-foot 1x10 pine or cedar board · An afternoon to build

CUT LIST (1x10 IS ACTUALLY 3/4" x 9-1/4")

- Back: 9-1/4" x 24"
- Side A (fixed): 16" back edge, 15" front edge
- Side B (opens): 15-3/4" back, 14-3/4" front
- Front: 9-1/4" x 15"
- Roof: 9-1/4" x 12"
- Floor: 7-3/4" x 9-1/4", four 1/4" drain holes
- Wood chips: 2" to 3" deep

TOOLS & SUPPLIES

- Saw, square, pencil and tape measure
- Drill, 3" hole saw, 1/4" bit
- 1-1/4" exterior screws (about 20)
- Untreated wood chips or coarse pine shavings
  - *not sawdust; owls bring no nest material*
- Sturdy ladder and a helper to hold it
- Safety glasses for everyone

1 Cut and angle the pieces

Cut the board per the list and label each piece. Angle the tops of both sides from back to front. Trim 1/4" off Side B so it can swing open.

2 Make the floor

Rip the floor to 7-3/4" wide and drill four 1/4" drain holes in it.

3 Cut the door up high

Measure 10" up the front and mark the bottom of the hole. Center the 3" hole side to side (its center is 11-1/2" up) and cut it with the hole saw. Sand it smooth.

4 Give the owlets a ladder

Inside the front, below the hole, saw grooves 1/4" deep and 1/2" apart from 2" up to just under the door. A few outside give the adults a grip.

5 Assemble the box

Screw Side A to the back, its bottom 4" up from the back's bottom edge. Set the floor 1/2" up so rain can't soak in. Screw on the front with the hole at the top.

6 Side, roof and paint

Hang Side B on two screws 1" from the top, one through the front and one through the back. Screw on the roof (not into Side B). Paint only the outside; air it out a week.

7 Add the wood chips

Swing Side B open and spread 2" to 3" of untreated chips. The eggs are laid right on them.

8 Mount it high, by January

On a tree trunk at least as wide as the box, 10 to 30 feet up, door facing south or east, never north. A branch nearby (not in front of the hole) helps young climb out.

The Height Rule

Door 10" up · Box 10–30' up

A high door keeps the chips and owlets safe inside.

Up by January for spring nesting.

Kid Builders · Schoolhouse Earth

Grown-ups: *sawing, the hole saw, and the ladder*

Kids can: *measure, mark, sand, drive screws with help, spread the chips*

After: *listen at dusk for a soft, bouncing trill*

Keep It Going

- Clean once a year after the young leave in summer: fresh chips
- Don't peek while eggs are being laid
- Keep cats indoors at dusk

Sources: Cornell Lab NestWatch, "Western Screech-Owl" nest box plans; Cornell Lab of Ornithology.