

COLORADO BLUEBIRD PROJECT

BLUEBIRD NEST BOX INSTALLATION

General Information:

Your backyard may be the perfect place for bluebirds! Bluebirds nest primarily in suburban and rural areas and can readily use our help for housing. Bluebirds cannot make their own houses, as they are second cavity nesters, relying on old woodpecker holes or rotting trees for places to build their nests. A manmade house is a welcome sight to most bluebirds, however, they tend to be a little more picky than most birds about how their house is designed and where it is located. You can build a nest box following the construction plans provided by the Town of Castle Rock or purchase one designed specifically for bluebirds. Follow our guidelines below to improve your success with bluebirds in your backyard.

How to Mount Your Bluebird Nest Box:

Bluebird boxes can be mounted on poles, fence posts or utility poles. Posts or poles are the best for providing protection from predators. You can purchase either wood or metal posts from your local hardware store or use existing fence posts or utility poles. The boxes are attached to a metal post using 16-gauge wire (see photo at right) and can be attached to wood posts or utility posts using wood screws drilled to the top and bottom of the back board. If you use a fence post, be sure to mount the box where livestock can't get to it. When possible, face the boxes toward the next fence post so that the birds can look into the entrance hole from a perch. Mounting on trees is less desirable because of the threat of climbing predators like cats, raccoons, snakes and squirrels.



The bottom of the nest box should be at least 3 feet above ground. Ideally, it should be mounted 4 to 5 feet above ground. Your main objective should be to deter climbing predators, but allow for easy monitoring. There is no single compass direction that the bluebirds prefer to have the box facing, but we have had success in Castle Rock by facing the boxes to the east or southeast to capture the most warmth from the rising sun. Face the boxes away from prevailing winds and towards some tree or shrub within 100 feet. When the young leave the nest, they will make an initial flight to safety, which is usually towards a nearby tree or shrub.

Where to Mount Your Bluebird Nest Box:

Whatever you do, make sure you place your nest boxes in good bluebird habitat. Not even the best bluebird house will attract bluebirds if it is in the wrong place. Here are some guidelines to follow for good bluebird habitat:

- Good areas for bluebird nest boxes include open fields, meadows, pastures, orchards where no pesticides are used, cemeteries, large lawns, golf courses, public parks and along open roadways that are kept mowed.
- During breeding, bluebirds hunt insects by scanning the ground from a perch, spotting an insect, then swooping down to the ground to get it. Scattered young trees or shrubs, fence posts, lower tree branches as well as light poles and street signs make good hunting perches. Sparse or low vegetation is also important since it enables the bluebirds to see and capture insects.

- Proper spacing of your nest boxes is important as bluebirds are territorial when breeding. It is recommended to space boxes at intervals no less than 100 yards (300 feet) apart, but may be closer if there is a visual barrier between boxes, such as a building or hill.
- Tree Swallows or Violet-green Swallows are likely to use the boxes in the Castle Rock area, so try setting out two boxes about 5–15 feet apart so that the bluebirds can use one and the swallows the other. Most bluebird monitors have found that pairing the boxes will allow both species to nest side by side in relative peace.
- Providing nesting materials is a strong factor in attracting nesting bluebirds since collecting nesting materials can take hundreds of trips. Bluebirds like soft grasses and fragrant pine needles as nesting material. Provide these nesting materials in a specially designed container, an empty suet cage, or simply gather bunches of material and situate in the bark of a tree.

Maintenance:

Please clean your bluebird houses after each brood has left or at least at the end of each breeding season. Remove and throw away any old nesting material and scrape off any droppings on the inside walls. Do not leave old nesting material on the ground near the nestbox because this could invite predators. Cleaning out old material and droppings inside the box will deter parasites. Also, regularly check your box for cracks or damage to the cavity entrance that will need repair.

Important Note:

It is important to remember that bluebirds and all other native birds that use nest boxes are wild birds that are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is not legal to touch or handle the eggs or young of bluebirds or any other native bird without a special permit. It is illegal to possess nests, eggs, or feathers of native birds without a special permit. Contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for more information about permit requirements.

When Should I Install My Nest Box:

Anytime and as soon as possible! Bluebirds start looking for breeding nest boxes in mid-March in Colorado. Bluebirds will use them well into August, producing 2 (sometimes 3) broods per year. Consider leaving your bluebird boxes up all year. When the mating season is over, other birds will use the boxes as winter roosts.

Monitoring:

If you are unwilling or unable to monitor your nest box (and prevent House Sparrows from nesting), it's better not to put up a box. But if you are interested in monitoring the nest box activity, please refer to the monitoring training guide provided by the Town. You can register your nest box with www.nestwatch.org.

For More Information:

If you interested in learning more about the Colorado Bluebird Project and how you can help locally, please contact Barbara Spagnuolo, Natural Resource Specialist, at 720-733-2294 or bspagnuolo@crgov.com. Also visit www.CRgov.com/bluebird. Additional on-line resources for nest box installation can be found at www.nabluebirdsociety.org/Fact/bluebirdfacts.htm.

Examples of Mounted Nest Boxes:

