

Homes For Wildlife

Purple Martin

Attracting purple martins is the ultimate challenge to a backyard bird enthusiast. Some people will put up a martin house in the spring and attract martins with relative ease. Other persons may maintain martin houses for years in apparently good habitat — with no luck in attracting them.

The purple martin is the largest member of the swallow family. It eats flying insects. Males are glossy black with purple iridescence. The markings of the female are somewhat duller.

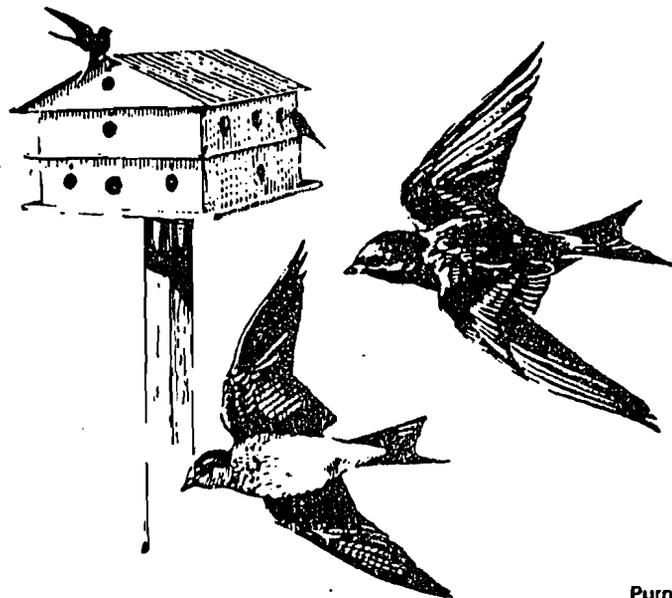
The wooden purple martin house design should be modified to add a 1/2-inch diameter maple dowel "fence" around each balcony to prevent baby martins from falling off the balcony. If they fall to the ground, they will not be fed by their parents.

Following is an itemized list of instructions for making this purple martin house.

CONSTRUCTION

Note: This unit is held together by a threaded rod extending from the underside of the 1"x2" base frame through the center of the chimney.

1. Mark all pieces on plywood sheet, then cut them out. Make four 1"x1"x5⁷/₈" corner blocks and eight 1"x1"x2" blocks to position the parts.
2. Cut out and assemble base from 1"x2". Use 7d galvanized siding nails. Attach floor piece to base with glue and 1" or 1¹/₄" nails.
3. Assemble the sides, alternating three hole and one hole pieces. Use glue and 1" nails or 3/4" #6 flat head wood screws. Use three at each end of each piece.
4. Position first-story sides on base piece. Mark position for each 1"x1"x2" block to hold side in position. Attach blocks to floor with glue and two 1" nails or 3/4" #6 flat head wood screws. Place completed sides in position on floor. Insert partitions. Position ceiling and mark for the location of 1"x1"x2" blocks near corners on the underside. Attach the blocks.



Purple martin

5. Place ceiling in position.
6. Glue pairs of end roof supports together to form gable ends 1/2" thick. Attach screen. Position and mark. Glue the two center roof supports together to make it 1/2" thick. It will be positioned adjacent to the threaded rod going up through the exact center of the house. Attach these pieces to the ceiling with glue and nails or flat head wood screws from the underside. Attach roof sides with glue and nails or screws.
7. Make chimney from a piece of 2x2. Cut V-notch on end to fit roof. Have it extend 2¹/₂" above roof peak. Drill 1/4" hole in chimney and roof for rod. Nail chimney in place. Insert rod and tighten up.
8. Drill hole in top of pole to accommodate nut on lower end of threaded rod.
9. Use 1/2" diameter maple dowels to make a fence about 2" high on each balcony. Pieces of wood 1"x1"x3" may be used as the corner posts of this railing.

MOUNTING

Use four 4"x5" shelf brackets with 1/4" or 3/16"x1¹/₂" round head stove bolts and 1" #8 flat head wood screws to attach to pole.

Note: Additional stories may be added if desired. One ceiling unit, four-sides, four-room partitions, eight 1"x1"x2" blocks, and four 1"x1"x5" 7/8" corner blocks will be needed for each additional story.

Do not paint the interior of the house. Lightweight roofing paper makes an efficient roof covering. When painting the house, use aluminum paint on the roofing paper before painting it white. This seals in the black tar of the paper.

Commercially-made aluminum houses are acceptable if they are well-ventilated, have at least six compartments, with each compartment at least 6"x6"x6" in size. The entrance holes should be 2¹/₄ inches in diameter and the bottom of the holes should be 1 inch above the floor.

Purple martins will arrive in southern Minnesota from about April 15 to 20. As soon as the first martins, or "scouts," are seen, remove entrance covers from the martin house. The covers are used to keep sparrows and starlings out during the winter. If a cold spell hits after martins arrive, insects will die and martins can starve. To help, place crushed egg shells on a flat, elevated surface near the martin house. Another special inducement for the martins is a 1'x2' area of soaked, unsodded earth which provides them with a "mud puddle" for a water supply.

Purple Martin, continued

Purple martin houses should be placed in an open area where the birds have clear access from all sides. The house should be at least 30 feet away from trees. Martins seem to prefer sites where utility wires are nearby for perching. Houses near open water like lakes may have added appeal but this is not essential. Martin houses should be painted white or a light color to reflect the sun's heat.

Some people suggest placing purple martin houses very high — from 12 to 18 feet. However, other people suggest placing the house on a 4"x4" cedar post no more than 8-to-10 feet high so it is easier to maintain during the summer with a step ladder. If in doubt, try using a 14"x4"x4" cedar post. Set it 4 feet deep in the ground and secure the base by pouring a small batch of concrete in the post hole before filling the post hole.

A martin house can be taken down, cleaned, and stored at the end of the summer, or the entrances should be covered as soon as the martins leave in late August to early September. If a martin house is left up, the nesting cavities still need to be cleaned out.

There are several additional tips to enhance the possibilities of attracting purple martins:

1. You cannot have purple martins and house sparrows because the sparrow is the martin's worst enemy. The best way to control sparrows is to trap them with the elevator-type sparrow trap. The elevator-type trap can catch as many as 20 sparrows a day if properly used because it catches more than one at a time.
2. In the spring when putting up a martin house, place a handful of sawdust in each compartment.
3. Spread a heaping tablespoon of powdered sulphur on top of the sawdust. The sulphur keeps out or kills the lice. Lice or red mites will otherwise kill or harm the young martins.
4. Spread alfalfa broken into 4 or 5 inch lengths on a bare spot near the house so the martins can use it for nesting material.

5. During the period when the young birds are being fed by the parents, spread crushed egg shells on a bare spot near the martin house. This provides calcium for the young birds.
6. To keep sparrows under control, pull their nests out of the martin house with a wire hook. Do this in mid-afternoon when most of the martins are at a pond or river for bathing or feeding.
7. Make sure the bottom of the compartment entrance holes are no more than 1 inch above the floor. This allows the young birds to get in and out to try their wings before they are ready to fly.

Northern Flicker

Northern flickers are a very common woodpecker across much of Minnesota. They frequently nest in farm groves, orchards, woodlots and in urban areas. Unlike most other woodpeckers, flickers usually forage for ants and grubs on the ground in crop fields and in grassy meadows and yards.

The "secret" of success in attracting flickers is to use 1½-inch thick cedar boards for nest boxes and to fill the interior of the box all the way to the top with sawdust. Tamp in the sawdust before April first so the box is ready when the flickers arrive. This house should have a hinged roof to facilitate filling it with sawdust. The filled box simulates a dead tree with soft heartwood. Since the northern flicker is a "primary excavator," it will start at the entrance hole which is provided and throw out sawdust until a suitable cavity is created. Since this box remains filled with sawdust if not used, sparrows and starlings are not a problem. The entrance hole should be 2½ inches in diameter.

These recommendations are offered by Mr. A.J. Boersma of Sioux Center, Iowa. He has maintained large colonies of martins for more than 50 years. He also suggests placing the house 8-to-10 feet high on a solid post rather than using tall, hinged posts. The hinges tend to break down with extended use. He also stresses the importance of adequate ventilation within the house. This is done by drilling one-half-inch diameter air holes between compartments and providing an open air shaft in the center compartment of the house up to the "attic."

The purple martin house design offered here is derived from the excellent publication *Shelves, Houses, and Feeders for Birds and Squirrels* by G. Barquest, S. Craven, and R. Ellarson. It is published by the University of Wisconsin Extension Service.

This brilliant nest box idea was developed by Mr. A.J. Boersma of Sioux Center, Iowa.

Flicker boxes should be placed 4-to-6 feet high along fence-rows that border crop fields or pastures. Or they may be placed in orchards and woodlots. Flicker boxes can be attached to existing fence posts or attached to free-standing posts with predator guards.



Compliments of:



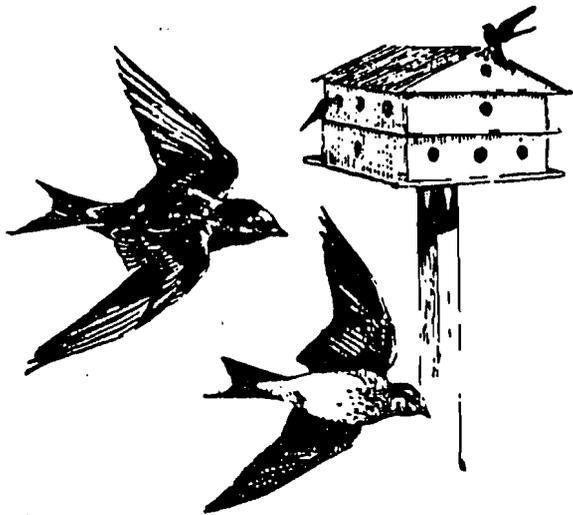
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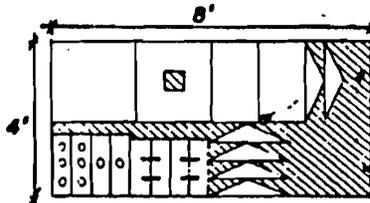


PURPLE MARTIN HOUSE

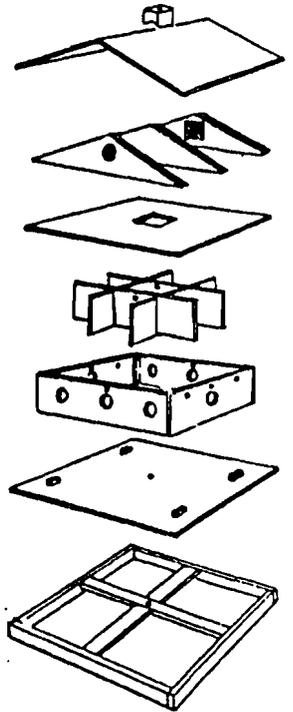
MATERIALS:

- 4'x8'x1/4" plywood
- 2"x2"x6" for chimney
- 1"x2"x14" (base)
- 1"x1"x8" (corner blocks)
- 4"x8" metal window screen
- 4" x 4" x 14' cedar post

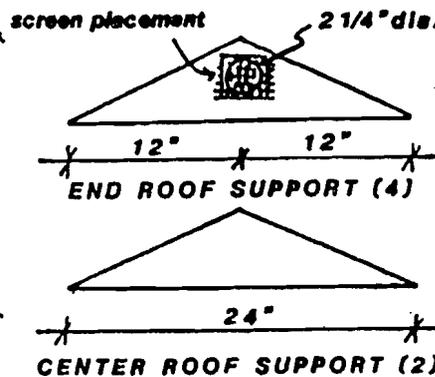
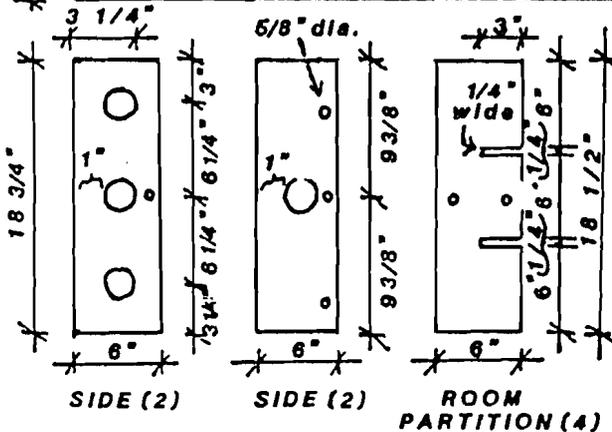
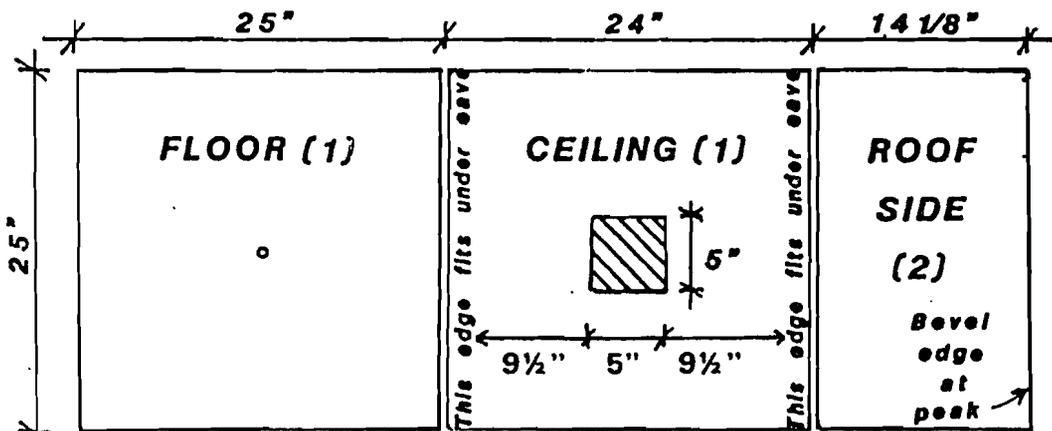
(not shown)
Place 1/2" dowel
railing around
balcony to keep
young from falling



Layout Pattern

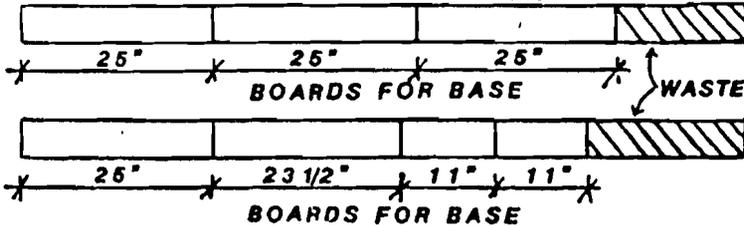


EXPANDED VIEW OF MARTIN HOUSE. A THREADED ROD INSERTS THROUGH THE BASE AND UP THROUGH THE CHIMNEY.



Entrance hole
diameter :
2 1/4"

Locate 5/8"
ventilation holes
1" below top
edge of sides



NOTE: This plan is for a one-story house. To add a second story, make one more ceiling unit (25"x25"), four more sides, and four more room partitions.