

Nest Box Cleaning Guide

- Nest boxes should be cleaned out after the fledging of each brood so that the birds will be able to use clean boxes for their second and third broods. If old nests are left in the boxes, the birds may build new nests on top of them but mites, blowflies and ants may start to live in the old nest material and there will be excrement from the previous brood. It's nicer to clean out the old nest so they will have a clean box to use.
- Remember – do not remove the nests of our native birds until after the young have fledged. Male wrens build multiple nests for the females to choose from. Once the female selects a nest, she builds a soft cup of grass inside. Some nests built by the male will go unused. These nests may be removed only after you have spent time observing bird behavior and waiting to be certain that these are indeed nests that will go unused. Sometimes the wrens will come back towards the end of the season and use them so it's good to watch their behavior. If wrens dominate your boxes, move the box at least 25' from the tree line or shrubby areas.
- Cleaning the box:
 - Make sure nestlings have left the nest.
 - When you are sure the nest is empty, open the box. Check for any unhatched eggs. Note it in your records.
 - Check for dead babies. Try to account for all eggs that were in the nest. This will give you an accurate fledgling count.
 - Remove the old nest since it is very dirty and compacted and may have parasites like mites and blowflies in the nesting materials. In addition, if the old nest is left and the birds reuse the box, they will build the new nest on top of the old one putting them closer to the entrance hole which can provide easier access by raccoons and cats.
 - Use a brush to clean out the box completely, making it ready for the next brood.
- At the end of the nesting season:
 - Clean out the nest box as above and add dry grass from the area. This will serve as insulating material for the birds as they roost during the winter. You may want to take additional steps to winterize the box as well (see article: "Winterizing Your Bluebird Boxes").
- At the end of winter:
 - Be sure to clean out the nest boxes by early-March and perform any needed repairs to the boxes to be prepared for the coming season.