

LOCATING A BIRD BOX

Always site your boxes facing somewhere between north and east, ensuring any nestlings will not overheat in the hottest part of the day, and keep well out of reach of cats. When it comes to fixing your boxes in their

final position, use screws and wall plugs on brick and stone buildings, and either screws or soft nails when fixing to trees. We use a large nail hammered in with about 2.5cm (1in) protruding, allowing for the tree to grow and push the box outwards along the nail.

If positioned well, it shouldn't be too long before your new box has some occupants. Don't disturb the birds during the breeding season, particularly once nest building stops, as the females will probably be incubating eggs. Once food is regularly being taken into the box, you know the young are feeding

well. After the young have fledged, leave the box until the autumn, to make sure any roosting birds have left for good. Then, remove the old nesting material as it will probably be housing some parasites, such as fleas.

POSITIONING AND FILLING FEEDERS

When it comes to feeding birds, location is everything. No bird will come to a feeder placed in the middle of an open and featureless plot. To encourage birds to visit, you'll need to site a feeder where a bird can hop safely from a nearby shrub or tree and then fly off without the risk of attack from a predator, including cats. Species such as hawthorn, dog rose, and holly are all excellent for providing safe refuge (see pages 52–57).

Place feeders within 2m (6½ft) of planting cover, and it is even better if there are a few taller shrubs and trees nearby. The ideal set up is to have a mature tree, such as a silver birch or alder, with maybe a smaller apple tree

Cats are the biggest threat of all to garden birds. Make sure all bird boxes and feeding stations are safely out of paw's reach.



A By putting out niger seed, you may attract bramblings.
B House sparrows love to feast on fat balls.

or rowan adjacent, to bring the birds down through the canopy layers, towards the dense cover and feeding station.

With the exact location decided, you need to think about what to put in the feeder. The best general advice is to buy a good-quality seed feeder and fill it with a mixture with a high content of sunflower hearts as well as other seeds, such as red and white millet, canary seed, kibbled maize, pinhead oats, and oil seed rape. Such a mix will offer a varied diet to the many potential bird species that might visit. Good-quality peanuts are excellent for many birds, and a real favourite of great spotted woodpeckers, nuthatches, and tits. These nuts give the birds a boost when they need the energy in the autumn and winter months. When it comes to fat balls, we opt for vegan versions as we feel that it's not ethical to feed birds animal-based products. Another important winter food is fallen apples, as thrushes, such as fieldfare, redwing, and blackbirds, really enjoy these in the harsh winter weather. All feeders need cleaning every three months or so.

Finally, offer a regular clean supply of water for birds to drink and bathe in; if you don't have a pond, simply fill a shallow dish or birdbath.

