

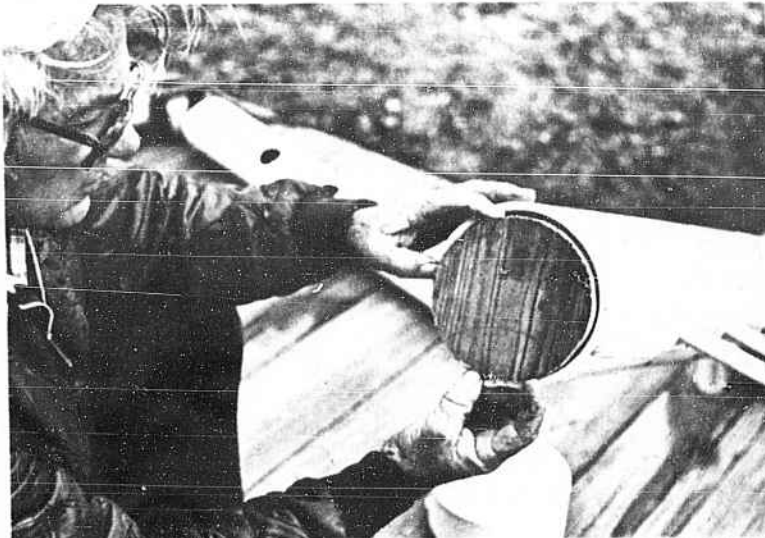
How To Build A Better Bird House

Have you ever heard the old adage—"build a better mouse trap, and the world will beat a path to your door?" Well, try this new adage—"build a better bird house, and the birds will not only beat a path to your door but will also sing beautifully and keep the local bug population in check."

This new adage may be a bit "wordy", but it is particularly true if you build a better purple martin house. Purple martins have been recognized as desirable birds for centuries. They are attractive, sing beautifully, and best of all, they eat insects by the thousands.

Purple martins are social by nature, and nest in small colonies. They are fairly easily attracted to multi-compartment bird houses and hanging gourds. Unfortunately, these nesting structures have their drawbacks. Compartment houses made of wood must be painted, and must also be taken down and cleaned every year. A wooden martin house with 10 or more compartments can also weigh over 60 pounds. Try removing one of these from the top of a 15-foot pole in a heavy wind! Gourds are much lighter than wooden houses and don't have to be painted, but will only last two or three years before they must be replaced.

A space-age material has come to



N.C. WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMISSION PHOTO

THIS HOMEMADE PURPLE MARTIN HOUSE may be built from plastic pipe for about \$30. Purple martins are not only attractive songbirds, but also prey heavily on mosquitoes.

the rescue, however, and it can be found at any building supply store. An 8-foot length of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipe can easily be turned into an attractive, durable home for 10 to 12 pairs of purple martins with a

minimum of trouble or expense.

Start by dividing the pipe into 6-inch sections by inserting round, wooden discs at 6-inch intervals. Then, drill a 2-inch entrance hole into each compartment, attach perches (use small pipes or dowels), and cap the top end of the pipe. The large pipe for the house, small pipe or dowels for the perches and end cap may all be purchased for around \$30. This compares very favorably to a wood house, which may cost as much as \$100.

The pipe house should be erected in a clear area near water on a pole at least 15 feet high. Since purple martins return from their wintering grounds in South America in several stages—usually beginning to arrive in North Carolina by early March—the houses should be erected before the birds arrive. If you're a little late, though, it's still worth erecting the house. You may be lucky and attract a new colony. Although established colonies return to sites occupied the previous year, surplus birds will leave these areas and seek new quarters.

For complete plans on building a PVC pipe house for purple martins contact the Division of Conservation Education, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh, N.C. 27611.



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