

GUIDELINES FOR PROPERLY CONSTRUCTED AND INSTALLED MARTIN HOUSES:

Purple Martin houses are generally large structures that can be complicated to build. Modern commercially built houses are available from several sources. Most incorporate the necessary features to provide purple martins with a safe place to raise their young including being lowered vertically. Be wary of cheap housing in general. Some housing using plastic components break down or cause failure for operation of opening cavities or keeping the house together. Always have methods to monitor the house or cavity at least weekly, preferably every three days during the nesting season. This will eliminate the competition and provide you with many hours of enjoyment and not of frustration. Important features are listed below:

1. Martin's nest in open areas including backyards, meadows, fields, farmland, near ponds and lakes. Martins especially like human inhabited residences nearby not to exceed 120 feet. The house should be placed in the center of a large opening at least 30-40 feet or more from large trees or buildings. Existing colonies are tolerable to being enclosed under 40 feet by the elements but may lose interest if better housing is located nearby. Always maintain open areas for proper flight and maneuverability for the martins. Larger areas of openings are always best, especially when trees are taller than your house placement height!
2. Nesting compartments should be at least 6" X 6" X 6" or larger and separated by partitions. Preference of cavities 6" X (8", 9" or 12") is made to ensure greater hatching and survival. On larger compartments, install the entrance to one side. This aids in the prevention of owl predation. Each compartment should have a minimum of a 2" entrance hole not exceeding 2 1/2" positioned 1 1/2" above the floor. Starling Resistant Entrance Holes (SREH) are utilized to prevent starlings from entering cavities shaped liked crescents, slots and bird shapes (see picture below). Note that "resistant," means some starlings may be able to enter. Exact size or shaped dimensions need to be implemented if hand made. Houses with railings assist to prevent young from falling. Gourds utilized must have at least 8" diameter at their widest point.
3. Houses should have capabilities of being ventilated and be painted a light color. White is preferred to reflect the sunrays in the summer. It is also the most often chosen color through conducted research.
4. Houses should be placed on poles 12-20 feet above the ground being able to withstand winds up to 90+ mph.
5. Houses should be easily lowered vertically for cleaning and monitoring with access openings for each cavity.
6. A predator guard is recommended below the housing to prevent climbing predators like cats, snakes and raccoons from raiding the colony. It should have a diameter of 8+ inches and be from 3-7 feet off the ground.
7. Never allow other species to occupy martin houses or gourds. This especially, includes English sparrows and European Starlings. Once present they will only cause future harm or death of martins or prevent martins from establishing.
8. It is advisable to place porch dividers to separate each cavity if they are connected. This safeguards males from dominating the whole floor or side of a house. Additionally, this acts as a blockage for older young martins to travel to other cavities for food.

