

WILLOWSFORD HOA GUIDELINES FOR INSTALLING BLUEBIRD NESTING BOXES

April 13, 2016

Bluebird nesting boxes support declining populations of the Eastern Bluebird and other native songbirds, and provide opportunity to watch beautiful and beneficial wildlife in your home landscape.

Provided you follow these guidelines when installing and maintaining a bluebird nesting box on your property, no Design Review application is required of residents.

PLEASE ONLY INSTALL A NESTING BOX IF YOU WILL REGULARLY MONITOR IT; AT LEAST ONCE PER WEEK DURING NESTING SEASON, MARCH TO AUGUST.

There are numerous types of nesting boxes. Each contains different features and is targeted at a particular bird species. Bluebird nesting boxes installed at Willowsford must be built to current specifications provided by either the Virginia Bluebird Society (www.virginiabluebirds.org), Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy (www.loudounwildlife.org), or the Willowsford Conservancy (see attached), and must be actual nesting boxes and not decorative bird houses. Boxes must be built correctly in order to attract bluebirds and protect them from other competing birds and predators.

Bluebird nesting boxes must have these characteristics:

- **Well built:** Watertight, yet ventilated and with drainage holes (to keep the interior cool and dry), built of natural, untreated, rot-resistant wood (i.e., pine, cedar or fir), at least ¾" thick to provide insulation
- **An extended and sloped roof** to keep the rain out
- **Rough or grooved interior walls** to help fledglings exit
- **No perch;** perches encourage competing birds and predators
- **Correct dimensions** following current specifications provided by either the Virginia Bluebird Society, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, or Willowsford Conservancy
- **Proper entrance opening** to keep out competing and predatory birds
- **Easy to monitor:** Nesting boxes must have a top or side that can be opened to monitor the nests during breeding season, and to clean them out during the off season.

Nesting Box Placement

Nest boxes for bluebirds should be placed in fairly open habitat including open field or lawn with scattered trees or bordered by fences. Nesting boxes are permitted in rear yards only.

Nesting Box Installation

Nesting boxes must be installed securely, to withstand high winds and severe weather – ideally on free-standing metal poles. Poles offer several advantages: boxes can be mounted at ideal height, and poles can be easily equipped with predator guards, and are difficult to climb by some predators. Nesting boxes should not be mounted on fence posts or other structures or trees.

When installing a bluebird nesting box, consider:

- **Location:** While scattered trees or shrubs are fine, choose a fairly open spot away from woods.
- **Mounting:** Use a metal pole with an added predator guard to keep out predators such as cats, snakes, and raccoons. Mount boxes about 5' high for easy monitoring and cleaning.

- **Orientation:** Face the entrance hole toward a safe perch, such as a small tree or fence, and away from prevailing winds and midday sun—preferably east, north, or southeast.
- **Spacing:** Bluebirds are competitive and usually claim two or three acres, and nest boxes should be spaced at least 100-150 yards apart. One box per yard is sufficient.
- **Sustainable habitat:** Since bluebirds eat insects, they can provide natural insect control. Avoid areas where pesticides and herbicides are used. These are not only harmful to the birds; they decrease the insects that are a primary food source for the birds. During breeding season, many birds feed their young almost exclusively with insects, because these are soft and high in protein, lipids and carotenoids vital for healthy bird growth.

If your habitat is not suitable for bluebirds, research habitat preferences for other native songbirds, and consult with the Willowsford Conservancy and HOA before placing a box.

House Pairing Tip: If other native species are consistently taking over the bluebird box, or you are looking to attract other species and have ample space, consider mounting two boxes back to back on a single pole. Birds such as tree swallows and bluebirds will nest closely to one another, although they will drive away others of their own species. Pairing boxes has the advantage of allowing birds of both species to coexist peacefully within the same habitat.

Dealing with competitors and predators

Non-native European starlings and house sparrows compete for nesting space and pose a great threat to bluebirds. They will attack bluebird nests and destroy the eggs and even kills adult bluebirds. Correctly constructed and placed bluebird nesting boxes reduce the risk from competitors and predators including European starlings, house sparrows, snakes and raccoons.

Nesting Box Monitoring and Cleaning

Willowsford residents are required to regularly monitor bird boxes placed on their property throughout the breeding season, following the attached guidelines.

Begin with cleaning the box in February, and repairing any damage. Once breeding season begins, monitor the box for activity. You can enjoy watching adults quickly dart in and out as they build their nests or feed hungry nestlings. If the box is used by invasive species, remove the nest. Doing this regularly will encourage the bird to move to another location and free the box for use by native species.

Once eggs have been laid, monitor and record the progress following the attached guidelines. Once the young have fledged and the box is no longer in use, it can be cleaned. Some birds will not use boxes with abandoned nests, and removing the debris reduces parasites for the next nestlings. If you remove old nests in time you could enjoy two to three broods per season!

Consider winterizing the box to provide roosting space for overwintering birds (see attached handout).