

BIRDS AND GOURDS

By Lois Wright, Patch Leader, Gourd Crafters, IBC County Coordinator

There are at least twelve different species of birds that are known to use gourds for nesting sites. The two most common birds are the Purple Martin and the House Wren. The table below lists the different species for Indiana along with gourd and hole sizes. Indiana does not have a long enough growing season to grow gourds large enough for the Hairy Woodpecker and the Flicker. Width (Gourd Size) is measured at the gourd’s widest point when it sits upright.

Species	Gourd Size	Hole Size
House Wren	6	1
Carolina Wren	6	1-1/2
Purple Martin	6	2-1/2
Chickadee	8	1-1/8
Tufted Titmouse	8	1-1/4
Downy Woodpecker	8	1-1/4
White Breasted Nuthatch	8	1-1/4
Eastern Bluebird	8	1-1/2
Great crested flycatcher	8	2
Small Owls	10	2-1/4
Hairy Woodpecker	12	1-5/8
Flicker	16	2-1/2

Sizes in inches

It is best to start out with true seeds if you wish to grow your own gourds. Gourds will cross pollinate easily with other gourds, cucumbers, and melons. There are two basic divisions of gourds, ornamental and hard shell. It is the hard-shell gourds that have at least 40 different types. Some are tiny and used to make jewelry and some are as large as an end table. They are all in different sizes and shapes.

One of my favorites is the large apple gourd. It looks like an oversized apple. The bottle shaped gourd is another favorite of mine in making birdhouses. It is best to germinate the seeds before planting. Do not harvest until you have at least two good killing frosts; you can let them rest on the trellis all winter where the air can circulate all around them. Turn them occasionally. Mold will form on the gourd and this is part of the curing and drying process. Once dried you should be able to shake them and hear the seeds inside rattle. It takes about a year from seed to curing and drying the gourd before they are ready to be made into a birdhouse. If you don’t want to paint them you can skip washing them and go with the natural look. They will last about two to three years outside that way.

If you prefer you can soak them in bleach and dish soap water and scrub off the mold and let dry, then drill drain holes in the bottom of the gourd, vent holes in the top, the entrance hole, and two holes at the top to run a wire through to hang the gourd. The placement of the entrance hole is important. You need to ask yourself what bird you wish to attract. Wrens that like to fly straight into the hole. Or, does your bird like to hop down into the hole? The hole should not be placed too low in the gourd that the babies would fall out. Another consideration would be a perch or not a perch. You could use a piece of gourd or a twig for a perch. I take a screwdriver and clean out at least some of the seeds but leave the membrane of the gourd in for insulation.

The last consideration would be the placement of the gourd. You need to know the habitat of the bird you want to attract. Wrens like brush, Bluebirds like open areas, Purple Martins want to nest in colonies. Any questions please e-mail Lois at lawright54@yahoo.com.