

ATTRACTING PURPLE MARTINS TO YOUR YARD

By Anne Frischkorn and Doris Heard



American Bird Conservancy



Matt Fendley



Terrell Sword



Wendy Reistle



Wendy Reistle



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Would you enjoy being a landlord to some wonderful neighbors who are very social, entertaining and helpful in controlling insects while doing aerial acrobatics around your yard in the evenings?

By installing a Purple Martin house in your yard, you will not only be inviting these delightful migratory native song birds to nest in your yard, but you will be helping to support a bird species that is in serious decline. These birds are in the swallow family and are communal cavity nesters. For hundreds of years, they have learned that being near humans helps to protect their nest, so they have come to rely on humans to provide nest boxes. They have site fidelity, so if you provide proper housing in an open area, these adults will take up residence, breed and return year after year to raise their young. When their babies (sub-adults) return the following Spring, they will be looking for new nesting sites. It is easy to be a landlord, and you might end up enjoying numerous houses in your yard. The video below was taken by Anne who started with one house and eight Purple Martins nesting. She is now planning to install another house to welcome back more than fifty martins to her yard this spring. Click on the video link to see what delightful entertainment her family enjoys in the early evening hours.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWQQaUDWuo4>

Purple Martins migrate 5,000 to 7,000 miles from South America each spring and the male scouts begin arriving in the Houston area early in February. They lay 3 - 5 eggs that hatch in 14 days. These nestlings will be ready to fledge in around 30 days practicing flight skills, catching insects and socializing. It won't be long before you notice that the martins will be gone during the daytime and only return home in the evenings. They are going to "staging areas" where they gather with other martins during the daytime. From July to September, Houston's Purple Martins form large flocks and roost together in preparation for migration to South America. They spend their day feeding on insects and around sunset they gather for a spectacular show before settling into trees for the night. Houston Audubon has regular viewing events at a pre-migratory roost located at the Fountains Shopping Center in Stafford. It is a fun event for the entire family as thousands of birds gather overhead at sunset. For more information:

<https://houstonaudubon.org/programs/all-age-groups/purple-martins.html>

If you decide to install a house in your yard, below are some tips to help you be a successful landlord:

- The pole you purchase should be 10 to 20 feet tall, anchored in concrete and at least 30 feet away from tall trees providing a clear flight path to the house. Being near a water source such as a swimming pool, lake, or pond works well. You need to be able to raise and lower your house on the pole to check on the nests and to catch problems early. You can preload some dry pine needles in the compartments. You will need predator protection on the pole to keep out raccoons and snakes. The protection can be a canister, netting or even Vaseline applied to the pole. The birds seem to know that human and even dog activity below their house provides additional protection from predators.
- Houses can be purchased online, but you need to be aware that many are not assembled. The house you select should have the special crescent shaped entrance holes that help prevent European Starlings from entering the compartments.



Photo Wendy Reistle

- You should be able to open each compartment to clean and check it. The martin nests are flat and need to stay dry – a raised floor, good drainage, and supply of pine needles will help. If sparrows start building in one of the cavities, immediately remove their nesting material. It is easy to recognize a sparrow's nest, because they build messy nests that fill up the entire compartment. Be aware. sparrows do not give up easily, but this is important because if not stopped, they will eventually take up all the compartments and run off the martins.
- From September to the end of January, lower the house on the pole, clean the compartments, and close up each entrance. You can leave the house low on the pole for the winter.
- Gourds, plastic or home grown, can also be used as nesting sites. Make sure they are at least 8" in diameter and have drainage holes in the bottom.
- If needed, recordings of Purple Martins are available online that can be played near your new house to attract the martins.

For more information and houses for sale this is an excellent resource:

<https://www.purplemartin.org>

This is a link to a Zoom presentation about martins with Mary Anne Weber, Houston Audubon Director of Education and Matt Fendley of University of Houston Clear Lake:

<https://www.facebook.com/houstonaudubon/videos/645614052824059>

It is an hour long but it is worth watching, if you plan to install a house.



This 8 room house by Coates comes assembled. They also have a smaller 4 and 6 room houses.

<https://www.purple-martins.com/purple-martin-houses/coates-waters-edge-8-room-martin-house>



The gourd houses are popular with the martins. This website has Gourd Racks.

https://www.purplemartinproducts.com/Gourd-Racks_c_185.html