



# Wood Duck Nesting Box Information

## MOUNTING AND LOCATION:

- Ideally choose a site near a wooded area and close to a wetlands/pond with a strong aquatic insect population. Both the egg laying hen and ducklings require a diet rich in aquatic invertebrates.
- Boxes should be erected on posts (wood or metal) with a metal predator guard. Hanging on a tree tend to provide predators easy access into the box.
- The metal guard can be flat or conical, but in any case it should extend in all directions at least 18 inches and should be 6-12 inches from the bottom of the box.
- Ideally, boxes should be placed over or at the edge of a water body and should be about 10 feet above the ground or water surface. However, ducks will accept boxes at substantial distances from water in secluded timber areas where natural cavities would occur.
- When hatching occurs away from the water, the female will immediately lead the young over land to water. Because at this time the ducklings are extremely vulnerable to predators and obstacles, these factors should be carefully considered in the selection of box sites.
- Wood ducks, unlike most other ducks, will tolerate close nesting by other wood ducks. Thus, boxes may be placed in clusters, and two or more may even be mounted on the same post without significant negative impact on nesting success.
- **In short, a box improperly erected and unprotected can become a death trap for the wood duck. So it should be done properly or not at all!**

## MAINTENANCE:

- Maintenance is extremely important since wood ducks do not collect nest materials, the bottom of the box should be filled with three inches of coarse sawdust or wood shavings to prevent the eggs from rolling. The sawdust/shavings needs to be changed every year.
- You can clean out the boxes anytime before the wood duck's spring arrival, however, check the boxes in March for any unwanted winter guests.
- For more information check out [www.woodducksociety.com](http://www.woodducksociety.com).



Dutchess County Soil & Water Conservation District  
2715 Rt 44, Suite 3, Millbrook, NY 12545  
845-677-8011 x3  
[www.dutchessswcd.org](http://www.dutchessswcd.org)

For more information check out  
[www.woodducksociety.com](http://www.woodducksociety.com).



## Other Tips and Information

- Wood ducks are secretive little birds. They prefer to while away the hours among the brush and tangle of a beaver pond, button-bush swamp or a secluded wetland. They will leave the sanctuary of these retreats to feed in corn or soybean stubble, but will seldom be found far from cover.
- There was a time, around the turn of the century, that for a number of reasons wood duck populations became alarmingly low. Fortunately, through the determined efforts of conservationists in cooperation with the various governments, steps were taken in time to save the “woodies.” The result was one of the most notable conservation achievements to date.
- Today there are several million wood ducks in North America, and their future is relatively secure.
- Nevertheless, there are still problems for wood ducks, the most significant of which relates to availability of suitable nesting sites. Unlike most other ducks, the woodie is a tree-nesting duck. They prefer a hole in a hollow tree, much like a woodpecker. Unfortunately, as the Nation’s demand for more timber and agricultural products increases, so does the pressure on natural nesting cavities. Forest management geared to maximum economic production provides minimal accommodation for the type of unsound trees that provide the nesting cavities.
- Biologists have known since the early 1900’s that wood ducks will nest in artificial structures, but it wasn’t until the early 1930’s that the idea was taken seriously. Since then the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the various State game departments have initiated numerous nest box programs that have resulted in varying degrees of success.
- In most instances when wood ducks are deprived of their preferred nest trees, they will accept artificial nest boxes. Furthermore, experience has shown that woodies hatched in boxes become “imprinted” and often prefer them over natural tree cavities.
- It is **IMPORTANT** to remember that the box is also attractive to many other creatures that will compete with the wood duck for a nest site, and there are a greater number of predators that will, given the opportunity, kill the ducks or destroy the eggs.
- Competitors include squirrels, owls, starlings, and woodpeckers. Predators include snakes, mink, raccoons, opossums, rats, wildcats, housecats, and a host of others. **However, Starlings provide the greatest threat to wood ducks.**
- The first prerequisite for producing wood ducks is availability of suitable habitat for rearing the young. Anyone who contemplates putting up nest boxes should first determine if there are lakes, ponds, or streams nearby that provide sufficient food and secluded cover for ducklings to survive those crucial vulnerable weeks before flight stage.

