

Patriotic Wren House

You'll flip your lid over this inventive birdhouse. It will even give you a chance to "sneak a peek" at baby birds.



If you've longed for a birdhouse that actually allows a glimpse at what's going on inside, this one's for you.

Mary Johnson of Parsons, Kansas developed this design several years ago using two basic pieces of hardware to make it possible—a small hinge and a simple hook and eye.

Ever since Mary first heard the song of wrens near her patio, she's been building houses to encourage them to stay around. After experimenting with several different designs, Mary developed this hinged-roof house that lets her get a close look at the nesting process. She painted it in bright colors, let it sit for several days to air out any odors and mounted it on a shed as soon as she saw a wren in her yard.

"The house hadn't been in place more than 30 minutes when the wren took it over," Mary says.

"If people tell you wrens won't nest in bright-colored houses, they're wrong!"

If you want to look in on the nestlings, Mary offers this advice. "Remember to only peek for a moment, so you don't worry Mom or Dad," she says. "They already have their 'wings full'." (It's best not to disturb the nestlings after about 10 days or they may try to leave the nest too soon.)

The hinged roof is also handy for cleaning out the house after nesting season. However, with wrens, it's not necessary to remove all the contents from the previous season—they'll often take care of spring cleaning themselves.

Give this easy-to-make house a try. We think you'll soon be hooked on its clever design.

Here's What You'll Need...



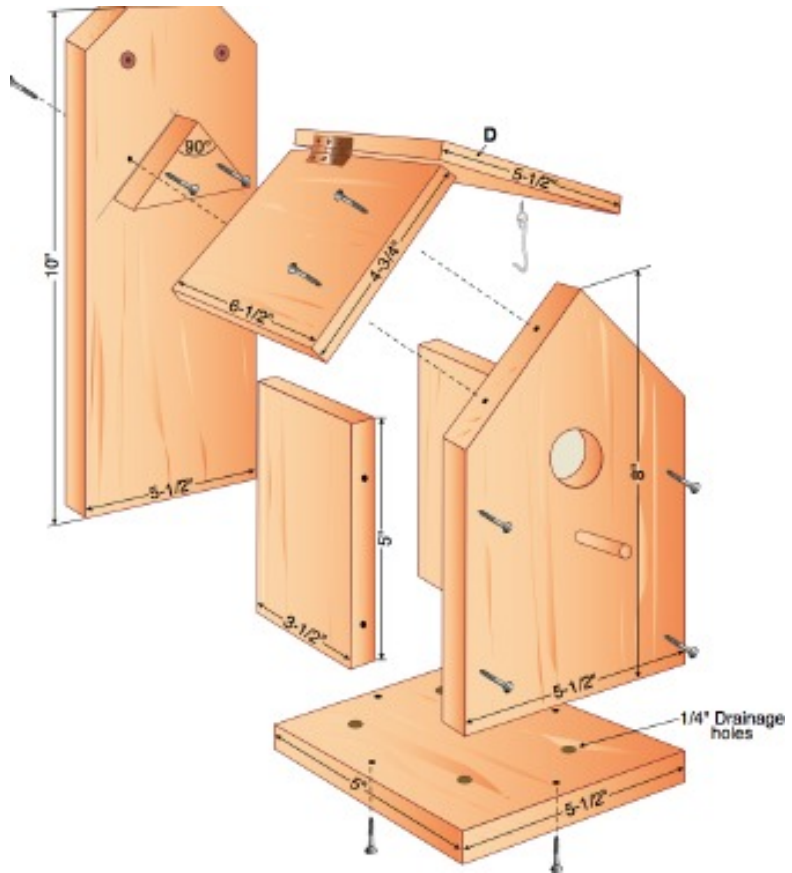
- 5-foot 1-inch x 6-inch No. 2 pine board
- 1-1/2-inch hinge
- 2-inch and 1-5/8-inch galvanized deck screws
- 5/16-inch dowel, 3 inches long (optional for perch)
- Hook-and-eye assembly
- Waterproof glue

Recommended Tools...

- Table saw
- Power drill
- Combination square

Let's Start Building

1. Cut the birdhouse pieces from a 5-foot 1-inch x 6-inch pine board as pictured in the board layout.
2. On the front piece, make two 45° angle cuts to form a centered peak.
3. Save a triangular piece from the front board for the rear support or make one from the corner of a scrap board.
4. Place the front of the birdhouse on top of the mounting board, lining them up so the bottom and sides are flush. Hold the pieces firmly in place and, with a pencil, draw the roof line onto the mounting board. Fasten the triangular roof support on the mounting board so the right angle (90°) aligns with the peak you just drew. Pre-drill the holes, then attach with 1-5/8-inch deck screws.
5. "Dog-ear" the top corners of the mounting board by cutting 1 inch off each corner at a 45° angle.
6. On the front piece, measure 5 inches from the bottom and drill a centered 1-inch entrance hole with a spade bit. Drill a 5/16-inch hole about 1 inch below the entrance if you'd like to add an optional perch, however, it's not necessary for the birds' sake.



7. Attach the front piece to the sides, then the sides to the mounting board using 1-5/8-inch deck screws (drill pilot holes first). The bottom edges of all four pieces should be flush.
8. Drill four 1/4-inch drainage holes in the floor approximately 1-1/2 inches from the edge. Set the house on top of the floor board so it's flush on all sides. Then, holding the floor in place, turn it over and drill pilot holes from the bottom for 1-5/8-inch deck screws.
9. Put the smaller roof piece in place and attach it to the front piece and through the mounting board with 1-5/8-inch deck screws. Drill pilot holes.
10. Position the larger roof piece (this will be the door) so it overlaps the smaller piece at the peak. Allow 1/16-inch clearance next to the mounting board so it doesn't rub when you open it. Attach the longer roof piece to the smaller one with a 1-1/2-inch hinge.
11. Screw the hook into the underside of the right overhang and the eye into the right side of the house to keep the door closed. Make sure the hook and eye are on the snug side so the house is safe from predators.
12. Glue the optional perch in place. If you're leaving the house unfinished, your work is done—just mount it with 2-1/2-inch deck screws (drill pilot holes for the screws in the mounting board first) and wait for the wrens to move in. If you want to give it a patriotic paint job similar to Mary's, see the story on the next page for instructions.

A Patriotic Paint Job

Dressing up this birdhouse is a simple task, with the right equipment, says Mary Johnson of Parsons, Kansas, who built and painted this clever patriotic wren house.

Mary decorates her birdhouses with folk-art paints, available at Wal-Mart and most hobby and craft stores.

"I usually use antique white as a base coat, with a contrasting color for the perch, roof edges and outer edges of the floor," Mary



says. "Then I just stencil on different designs."

For the patriotic house, Mary stenciled on red and blue hearts, stars and birds. The rooftop flags are painted by hand. To ensure straight stripes, Mary used strips of masking tape to help.

The last step is the most fun. Mary lightly "spatters" the whole birdhouse with a contrasting color of paint.

She does this with a homemade "spatter yoke", which is very simple to make. Just form a "Y" shape out of scrap pine, stretch a bit of wire window screen across the opening and staple it in place.

Here's the trick to "spattering":

1. Put a small amount of paint on a piece of aluminum foil and thin it with a drop or two of water.
2. Rub the bristles of a toothbrush in the paint.
3. While holding the spatter yoke over the birdhouse, press the toothbrush onto the screen and brush with an outward stroke, flinging the paint toward the house.



"This technique does a great job of spattering and saves your fingers from getting covered with paint," Mary says.