



Time to Gather those Nest Materials!

-Mona Bearor

Spring nesting season will soon be upon us and you can give a warm welcome to returning songbirds by providing nesting materials in addition to nest boxes. One of the best parts about collecting and offering nest materials for your yard birds is that there is little, if any, cost involved. There are many items you can find in and around your home right now that the birds would welcome as they gather the bits and pieces which will soon shelter their babies. Recycling in this way is fun and performs a valuable service for your feathered tenants.

All the following may be offered: narrow strips of cotton fabric or natural fiber yarns cut into 3 or 4 inch lengths, short lengths of cotton string or thread, feathers from an old down pillow, almost any natural fiber in neutral colors, hair from your hairbrush. Your pets can help too - hair from your dog would be welcome and, if you have horses, those long strands of horsehair from the mane or tail are especially loved by some species. Never set out dryer lint for birds; although it was recommended in the past, the current thinking is that it can contain synthetic fibers not healthy for the birds and it does not hold up well after a rain - it becomes compressed and dries out too slowly, making an uncomfortable nest. Remember that mud is a construction material utilized by many species so keep a muddy puddle available in an out of the way corner of your yard.

When you perform spring cleanup in your garden you may save some thin dead twigs, dry pine needles, dried grass, straw and even the wilted leaves from daffodils and tulips. They will all be used.

Nesting materials should be placed so that birds can easily find them. They may be set out in the crevice of a tree, in a suet basket or in one of those mesh bags in which onions are purchased. Never place nesting materials in or on a nest box because the birds may think that the nest box is occupied. Providing nesting materials can be a fun and interesting way to observe bird behavior. Try it this spring and let us know what other items you have found that your birds chose to use in their nest. We'll print them in the next newsletter and you can use that money you saved to buy another field guide!