

The Best Turf Tips of 1995

One of the most popular annual features of the Education Conference is the Best Turf Tips. This year, 14 of the Green Section's agronomists reported on some of the helpful ideas and ingenious innovations they came across while visiting golf course superintendents in every part of the country during 1994. The Turf Tips appear throughout this issue.

Recycling for Habitat

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Nestboxes designed and built by George McBath come in all shapes and sizes.

ALL OF US KNOW that golf courses are not sterile environments that are devoid of wildlife, but it behooves us to give more specific attention to better habitat management. Regardless of whether a golf course is located in an urban or rural location, a nestbox program is an excellent means of attracting native species to a property and providing additional habitat.

A wide variety of nestboxes and birdhouses can be purchased or built to specification. A problem encountered in Florida is that wooden structures tend to deteriorate quickly as a result of the high humidity. This was a problem that ornithologist George McBath experienced after putting up nestboxes at Eagle Creek Country Club in Naples, Florida. A number of the wooden boxes rotted very quickly, and it was apparent that they would not last more than

a year or two. Another problem was woodpeckers, which enlarged the entrance holes.

McBath, who is also a member of the Audubon Resource Committee at Collier's Reserve Country Club in Naples, has come up with an excellent solution to these problems. By using scrap PVC irrigation pipe and reprocessed plastics to build the nestboxes, he and the courses he has been working with have been *recycling for habitat*.

According to McBath, 6 percent of the purple martin's diet is mosquitoes. Even if the purple martin helps get rid of just a few of these nuisance insects, I think we would all agree that attracting purple martins is a worthwhile endeavor.

The actual martin "houses" are made of 6- or 8-inch-diameter PVC pipe scraps with sheet aluminum tops and bottoms. For all attachments, 30-lb. test fishing line is

used, which can be cut and replaced when monitoring or cleaning the boxes. Unlike commercial aluminum martin apartments, no front porches are used on the boxes made by McBath. This minimizes crow and owl predation. The 3-segment pole is made of 3-inch-, 2-inch-, and 1.5-inch-diameter sections with pins in the middle to facilitate raising and lowering of the martin house for cleaning. The base of the pole is sunk about 3 feet into the ground. McBath recommends the martin houses be located in an open space at least 40 feet away from tall trees, but close to an open water source.

In addition to the purple martin houses, nestboxes for eastern bluebirds, Carolina wrens, great crested flycatchers, downy and red-bellied woodpeckers, kestrels, and screech owls have been constructed. For mounted boxes, *lumber* scraps from dock building jobs are attached to the backs of the boxes. This lumber is made of reprocessed #1 and #2 plastic soda bottles and milk containers. All of the boxes are painted a light color for heat reduction. In side-by-side comparisons conducted by the North American Bluebird Society, it was found that there was no preference in use between the PVC boxes and traditional wooden nestboxes.

McBath stresses that anyone starting a nestbox program is morally obligated to remove starling and English sparrow nests from the boxes. Besides taking over the nestboxes, these noxious imported species from Germany and England will invade any natural nesting cavities and displace the desired native species. He suggested plugging the entry holes to keep them out until the nesting season is about to begin.

Contact your local Audubon chapter for information about nestbox specifications or try your hand at recycling for habitat. Who knows what feathered friends you might call home!