

Housing Types:

There are a few basic requirements for Purple Martin housing.

1. Adequate size of nesting cavity, the cavity should be at least 6 inches wide and 10 inches deep (from opening to back). The height of the cavity should be at least 5 inches and can be much taller as long as the cavity allows a way for the birds to climb out. These dimensions allow for a very broad interpretation in terms of design but are much more generous than the inadequate recommendations of a 6X6X6 cavity of fifty years ago.
2. Martins are gregarious and nest in colonies with 6 or more cavities grouped together. My colony has 100 plus available housing cavities but colony size is relative to the amount of time you want to dedicate to the hobby. Most times housing is thought of as 'housing poles' and each pole holds 12 to 24 cavities. A colony is expanded by adding additional poles. A pole may be a house style or a rack style. Any number above 24 units on a pole is usually more than a typical pole can handle.
3. Talking about poles, any pole used should allow the housing to be raised and lowered vertically. This is usually accomplished with a series of pulleys and rope ,or with the use of a winch and cable. There are many different models of purple Martin poles but serviceability is definitely key

Another factor with housing is the entry hole. In my opinion a Starling resistant entry (SREH) is a must. My colonies started out years ago without starling resistance entry holes and starlings definitely take a negative toll on a colony if they're not managed. The time, effort and stress of dealing with starlings nesting in your Martin housing is tremendous. The use of a SREH saves so much time and aggravation, and provides safety to your martins, that there is no reason round openings should be used.

There is a broad assortment of styles and features to choose from when it comes to Purple Martin house. Over the 45 years I have been a Martin landlord including my 20 years as a want to be I have tried many different types. Those my first house was a wooden 16 compartment house that I built in seventh grade shop class. This house have a 4 x 4 pole and lowered by tilting mechanism making the house unserviceable during the season and only able to be inspected at the beginning or the end of the season when the Martin's were not nesting. Or at the top of the ladder. This house never was successful attracting birds then the actual house.

Here I will review some of the housing that I have used over the years or that I am familiar with . In the end If you are wondering my preferred housing ? It is the ChirpyNest. You will have a better understanding why after reading my reviews below.

In starting a purple Martin colony- remember- **start small** (6 to 12 cavities) and grow into it, especially if you are under a tight budget. **Plan ahead.** Look for help locally if possible. **Educate yourself.** **Enjoy!** I've often caught myself working and worrying when I should have been watching in wonder.

A history of Purple Martin housing..



This house is similar to one of the first houses I remember seeing as a kid. The entrance to a local country club had stone columns with one of these houses mounted on one of the columns. I can't remember if I ever saw martins in it but I was told ' it used to have martins'. "It used to have martins " or a very similar phrase is one often encountered when exploring local Martin houses, Trying to learn. I grew up in the late 60's early 70's so I date this house to the fifties or early. 60's. While stylish, a house like this, and most houses older than 1965 are not suited to today's martins. With the increase in starlings and sparrows during the

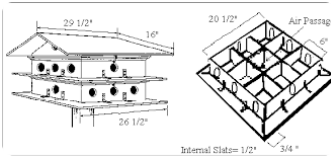
1900's any house that could not be serviced, easily became a factory for these invasive birds, kicking out martins from their traditional nesting places.

As a garden ornament, stylized houses such as this one can still be erected but the holes should be blocked with screen on the inside so birds cannot enter.



This is another wooden house design that I fell in love with as a kid. A house like this one was the home to an active colony at a local fruit stand and greenhouse called Kramers, that my parents would visit during the summer. This photo is from a set of plans for this house that I intended to build many years ago but never got around to it. One day I plan to modernize a style similar to this and incorporate the ChirpyNest system into it.

I do not recommend anyone to build a house unless the house can be raised and lowered vertically, and compartments are accessible. These houses are not.

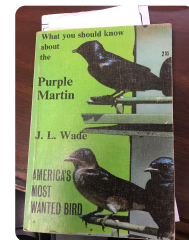


Here is the plan for the first Martin house that I built in seventh grade shop class. The house can be seen to the right of the basketball goal in the picture. This house with the standard at the time 6X6X6 compartments was built of 3/4 inch pine, had asphalt shingle roof and was mounted on a 4x4 tilt pole.

Martins never used this house but many a day was spent looking skyward attempting to will passing martins to come down to the house. Some time after I graduated college the house came down and the attempt to attract martins at my childhood home ended. As you can see from the picture, trees were always a concern, although it was within most guidelines at the time as far as distance goes. Another smaller 6 room aluminum house in the side yard at home did attract martins

but they were never successful raising young. These early attempts taught me optimism and determination and every march was filled with anticipation. During these unsuccessful years I was fortunate to have two uncles with Martin colonies and a third uncle that was golf course superintendent at the aforementioned club with two trio houses full of martins. I got real good at hearing martins in and got my Martin fix by visiting colonies and watching martins soaring above.

During the 1960's a revelation of sorts occurred in regards to Martin housing. The introduction of the Trio line of houses. These aluminum houses provided convenient features to make Martin land lording easy for the times. The book 'What you should know about the Purple Martin is one that for me fueled my passion for martins. The catch line "martins can eat 2000 mosquitos per day" gave everyone a reason to attract martins. This phrase is still quoted today by many many people. Can and do are actions very far apart and a martins diet is far from living up to the ,mosquito claim. However J.L.Wade arguably could be credited with saving Purple Martins by vastly increasing martins popularity.



Often forgotten is the fact that Wade claimed to have solved the starling nesting problem with the Trio houses' shiny interiors. I remember pasting aluminum foil on the inside walls of my first house due to his claim. It turns out the shiny interiors were not the reason starlings hesitated to use the houses, it is the small size of the compartments that made the trio houses unattractive to starlings. Measuring 6x6x6 this is

the minimum size martins will use but not large enough to make starlings readily use them. Unfortunately this 6x6x6 size became the standard for many Martin house plans and market competitors.

Many features of the trio line are great but ;these houses today are ;best converted to double size compartments thus turning a 6x6x6 compartment into a 6x12x6. Even with the double size, my big knock on these houses is the water that seeps under the doors, soaking nests through absorption . Their long life and strong construction make



the Trio houses a great find when you see one neglected in someones yard from a failed attempt at becoming a landlord. Many times the owner will give you the house and with a little work you can convert it to a good starter house. I wouldn't invest in one new any more because the company has not increased the compartment sizes on their own.

The small trio house pictured is one I salvaged 25 years ago and it was probably 20 years old air the time, Possibly one of the first trios sold. I am going to finally retire it this year, 2019.

GOURDS

Nothing is more traditional than gourds hung for Purple Martins. I however was taught by Mr Wade that gourds were never to be used as housing for martins. The image of early gourds being hung for martins by native



Americans is iconic. Showing pictures of dilapidated gourds over run with sparrows sold a lot of trio houses, and instilled ,in my young mind at least, that gourds were not going to bring success to the want to be landlord.

Ironically after twenty some years trying tp establish a colony, I finally found success after being re-edcuated on the history and attractiveness of gourds when I discovered the PMCA, in the early 1990's. I wonder sometimes why gourds haven't evolved into something better, then I realize that with the ChirpyNest - they have. Gourds have always been and still are, an inexpensive way to "get martins". As before, gourds have several major disadvantages for the martins and the modern landlord .

I will discuss natural and plastic gourds separately.

Natural gourds

In my opinion natural gourds are far superior to plastic gourds in attracting martins. Given a choice I have found that martins will pick natural over plastic. I also know from experience that the work to maintain a colony, especially one that grows beyond one or two poles, using natural gourds is just too much work. Growing, drying, cleaning, installing access ports, and annual or at least bi-annual painting became too much for me and caused me to convert to plastic. I just retired the last of my natural gourds, some of which lasted well over the ten years.

The biggest attributes of a natural gourd are its roomy size, as long as you start with 10-12 inch gourds, natural materials and more importantly the individuality of the cavity when hung. I think martins like this extra space



around their cavity. These are the atributes I have incorporated into my chirpyNest cavities . By providing a cedar threshold I also incorporated the natural material that a gourd provides.

Plastic Gourds

I was not an early adopter of plastic gourds. The first plastic gourds I saw looked nothing more than a small bottle with a two inch hole cut into it. Sadly I still see these being sold as Purple Martin gourds. When I speak of plastic gourds now, I am discussing a much higher quality product such as the Super gourds or the Troyer line of gourds.

Personally, I had poor success in converting my colony to plastic gourds as my natural gourds declined. It wasn't until I added the tunnel entry to the plastic gourds that my martins started using them and I became confident in using them.

Plastic gourds now are sold as vertical or horizontal types. Many other landlords have a preference but for me after a tunnel was added I don't see much difference as far as martins using them. If I had to pick I lean toward the vertical hanging.

What I don't like about plastic gourds is the access port for nest checks is located on the side and can be difficult to look into and do nest checks. The other knock is that ventilation is not good and has to be modified in order to get a small amount of ventilation. The smooth plastic surface has never appealed to me either but the low maintenance requirements and availability of a quality plastic gourd has now become the standard of the Purple Martin world. For me the questioning of this standard and annoyance of adding a new modification to plastic gourds, almost every year is another factor that led me to start with a clean slate in developing the ChirpyNest.



The T-14 House

This house, designed by Andy Troyer of Pennsylvania has become the standard for modern multi compartment Purple Martin houses. With 14 - 6x6x12 inch compartments. And the simplicity of the design this house is my favorite traditional house. Here it is seen with 4 ChirpyNest cavities hanging underneath. Before the ChirpyNest I had 4 gourds hanging from it. This house was added to my site in 1998 but it took about three seasons for the birds to have more than one or two nests in it. Early on I converted my T-14 to ten compartments by making the top compartment on each side a double deep compartment. The sloped floor of this top compartment became the blueprint for the ChirpyNest cavity.

I would recommend building it from western red cedar or redwood if possible, in order to keep the weight down. Nest trays can be added in order to make nest checks and changes easier but doing so will reduce the size of the cavities slightly. After twenty years of service my cedar house looks as good as new with a new paint job every three years or so. I love having a classic house at my site and the T-14 is a perfect one to have. Negatives are the lack of ventilation and drainage as well as flat nesting floors which allow owls to reach in and try to force birds around the walls, creating opportunity to snatch one. SREH's are a must with this house as starlings love it. There is an aluminum version made by Lonestar, but I have not had the opportunity to use one of these. I have had wet nests on occasion with this house but with proper management one can monitor this.



The Trendsetter House

This house is the one that replaced two lines of gourds at my colony site. This unit has 26 cavities that measure about 5.5 x 11. I picked this house because I like the idea of another house style addition to my colony. I Added this house in 2015 but after the 2018 season I sold it and am replacing it with a round rack with 14 of my ChirpyNest cavities.

The martins just never did take to it. I too became disenchanted with it for a couple reasons. I did not like the way you had to access the cavities for nest checks. The front panels covering three cavities was difficult to remove and the crescent openings were situated too high from the porches, which allowed starlings to breach the openings. I had to add a layer to the porch in order to correct this condition but this made access even more difficult. Quality, ventilation and design were all nice but the screen nest floors were useless because once a nest was built, the screen touched the floor making the nest soak up any water that seeped in. Cavity size was slightly smaller than the T-14 but adequate. Smaller versions of the trendsetter may be different, but overall, the house did not live up to expectations for me. When deciding on this house, I was choosing between this and the Lonestar house. Because of the similarities in style with the T-14 I chose the Trendsetter in order to add variety of style. In its place for 2019 I have installed a 'Round rack' on the same pole and will be adding 14 ChirpyNest cavities.



The ChirpyNest house

I have now gone through three nesting seasons using the ChirpyNest housing system. In 2019 I am putting my money where my mouth is and going with all ChirpyNest units in place of gourds of any kind. (I may put one single gourd up in order to do temperature studies). That will make my colony consist of 100

ChirpyNest cavities, a 12 room double size castle and my T-10 house.

The aluminum construction, nest tray, front access and excellent results I have had give me all the confidence I need to make this move and to say that The ChirpyNest is better than anything else available. Better for the landlord and better for the martins. The early adopters during 2018 have had good results as well. My first question after developing this system, 'will martins use it? That answer was a very quick YES when upon arrival in March of 2016 a Chirpy Nest cavity was one of the first to be claimed. 2017 the system was added at the Virginia highlands community college and the martins filled 17 of 26 cavities.

Will other landlords see my vision and try the ChirpyNest?? In 2018 I got a resounding YES to that question as well. Over 20 landlords joined the ChirpyNest colony that first year I made them available.

In 2019 I will have 200 of the cavities available for landlords to add to their colonies. I am looking forward to the success these landlords have with ChirpyNest.



Of all the housing. I have used over the years The ChirpyNest is by far the best. I like to call ChirpyNest the Purple Martin housing of the 21 century. Every year brings a different set of challenges for the martins and their landlord. I will continue to evaluate the ChirpyNest through these challenges and through feedback from other landlords continue to improve the ChirpyNest system.