



How to Build a Chicken Nesting Box

Three Methods: [Building a Nesting Box](#) [Setting Up the Inside](#) [Installing the Box](#)

Chickens like having a safe, dark, and warm place to lay their eggs. Providing a secure and welcoming location for chickens to lay their eggs not only makes it easy to collect eggs without hunting for them, but it can reduce stress in the coop as chickens learn to rely on a consistently comfortable nesting site. Build a nesting box into your hen-house to give them a convenient place to lay. You will need one box for every 2-4 hens. A few basic guidelines will help to make your box inviting, convenient, and easy to maintain.

Method
1

Building a Nesting Box

- 1 Choose the materials that you will use to build your nesting box.** If you'd like to build upon an existing structure, consider re-purposing a crate, a cabinet, an old pet carrier, or a barrel. Otherwise, feel free to build a comparable box from scratch using wood, metal, or plastic. The box should be sturdy, heat-retentive, and easy to clean, so choose your base materials accordingly. Review the following steps for a few straightforward box ideas.
 - Try re-purposing storage containers: kitchen cabinets, barrels, milk crates, wash basins, old pet carriers. Make sure to thoroughly wash these things before use, especially if they've held something that can be toxic to chickens.^[1]
 - Construct boxes from found materials, when possible. This can save on costs, and it may give character to your backyard coop. Build a box from wood, metal, or plastic—whichever is available.
- 2 Design your nesting box(es).** You will need one box for every 2-4 hens. Each "nest" should be roomy enough to contain a laying hen and small enough to feel secure. Twelve cubic inches (12" x 12" x 12") is an ideal size. The interior should not be higher than two feet, as hens like to roost in cozy spaces.
 - Make sure to add a comfortable access point for the chickens to enter and exit. Make sure to add a slight lip to the entryway so that the chickens' bedding (sawdust, straw, etc.) cannot easily spill out.
 - If you're building a nesting box from scratch, pitch the top of the box at a 45 degree angle to discourage chickens from roosting and pooping up there. If you're using a cabinet or another found object, consider nailing a plank the roof with one side lifted at a 45 degree angle.^[2]
 - The boxes need not be square or absolutely symmetrical. The important thing is that your chickens are comfortable.
- 3 Make a nesting box out of a kitchen cabinet.** Find an old wooden kitchen cabinet. The cabinet should be at least 18 inches deep, and it should have working doors that are at least two feet high. Try asking around at secondhand stores and recycled furniture stores. If you already have any old cabinets, or if you plan to replace your current kitchen cabinets, this is the perfect opportunity to reuse them toward a productive end. Make sure that the cabinet is sturdy; it need not be in perfect shape, but it shouldn't be falling apart.
 - Ask friends if they have any kitchen cabinets that they aren't using. Poke around junkyards, demolition sites, city streets—anywhere someone may have thrown out a perfectly good kitchen cabinet.
 - Realistically, you can use any cabinet-like box as long as it is large enough, warm enough, and sturdy enough.
- 4 Build a 12" x 12" x 12" nesting box out of wood.** Use plywood or any other large cut of cheap wood. Follow these steps to construct the basic nesting box:
 - Cut your wood. Measure one square foot out of a piece of wood—this will be the bottom. Cut another square of the same size for the back, and one more for the bottom of the side piece.
 - Your three squares should form a rough triangular shelter. You will need to make two such triangles.
 - Ask a helper to hold the back of the box against the bottom while you nail/screw the pieces together.

- Have your helper hold one of the sides to the bottom and the back while you nail/screw the pieces together. You will need to use several nails or screws to connect the sides solidly to the bottom and the back. Repeat this process for each side. You should have an open box.

5 Try building a quick nesting box from a clean wooden half-barrel. Turn the barrel onto its side so that it is easily accessible from the ground. Nail or screw a 2x4 to the edge where the opening of the barrel meets the ground. This forms a lip that will hold in hay and eggs. Fill the barrel with two inches of straw, wood shavings, or sawdust—and you are ready to go.^[3]

Method 2

Setting Up the Inside

1 Divide the box into two nests. Try to make the nests equal in size. If you used a cabinet, lay it onto its side. Build a one-foot-deep divider across the center of the now-bottom section so that you will have two nesting boxes.

- You can use a shelf, a piece of plywood cut to size, or any flat slat of wood. Drive nails or screws through the back of the cabinet and into the slat.
- You can use the top section of the cabinet to store sawdust and egg cartons. If you need the space, you can convert it into two more nest boxes.

2 Add a sloped top to the nesting box. You don't want your chickens to roost or poop on top of their nesting boxes—that would be a big mess. Angle the top of the nesting box at about 45 degrees to dissuade hens from perching on or above the nesting boxes.

3 Fill each nest 2-3 inches deep with bedding. This will keep your chickens comfortable and protect the eggs that they lay. Replace the bedding every few weeks to keep the nest sanitary and attractive. Wood shavings, straw, and sawdust are cheap but effective choices. Consider the pros and cons of each material:

- Wood shavings tend to be easier to clean out than hay or sawdust. They are generally more absorbent, less messy, and better-smelling. Try to find a wood mill or woodcutting center in your area to keep the cost down. If you have a wood-chipper, you can make them yourself.^[4]
- Hay is not as absorbent as pine shavings; it retains more moisture and mold than the other materials. However, many people favor hay, and chickens often enjoy pecking through strands of hay. You can buy hay at a feed-and-supply store or ask around your community.
- Sawdust is relatively easy to sweep out of the box, making it ideal for chickens that poop in their nests. Bear in mind, however, that there is a risk of your chickens eating some of the sawdust, and thus ingesting toxic tannic acids. Sawdust remains damp long after it is wet, and it can be difficult for birds to work with.^[5] The dusty material may also stick to fresh eggs and dry on the shell.^[6]

4 Cut a door into the back panel. It should be at least six inches wide, and tall enough for your chickens to pass through without much effort. Don't make the door too large—chickens like their nesting box to be dark and draft-free. Use a handsaw to cut the door, and make sure not to leave any jagged edges.

Method 3

Installing the Box

1 Place the nesting box in a low-traffic part of the coop. Finding a good location is imperative when installing nesting boxes. Place nests in the least-traveled part of the coop to prevent disturbances while hens are laying.

2 Install the nesting box two or three feet (0.6-0.9 meters) off the ground. This will discourage predators from invading, and it will prevent debris from collecting on the floor of the coop. You can prop it up on bricks, cinder-blocks, or tightly-pressed earth; nail it to the wall or hang it from the ceiling; put it onto (sturdy) stilts, or nail together a simple wooden base.

- Make sure that the nest boxes aren't so high that the hens have a hard time accessing them. If the nest boxes are higher than the roosts, you'll have hens sleeping inside the nest boxes.

- 3 Consider building the cabinet into the outside wall of the hen house.** Arrange the six-inch-wide back-panel door to face inward, and set the "front" of the cabinet facing outside. This way, you will be able to open both cabinet doors from outside the hen house.^[7]
- 4 Build a roost bar and a protective lip at the entrance of the nesting box.** Put a roost bar or step in front of the entrance for the chickens to jump up onto. Make sure that there is space for the chickens to clutch the roost with their talons. Use a 2x4 plank, an old broomstick, or any sturdy wooden pole.
 - Add a "lip" to the front of the nesting box to keep the bedding material and/or eggs from being pushed out: affix a small (2-5 inches high) piece of wood to the front so the eggs do not fall if the chickens move.
- 5 Introduce the chickens to the nesting box.** Encourage chickens to use nesting boxes by placing plastic eggs or golf balls in the nests to simulate recently-laid eggs. You should collect the eggs daily, but bear in mind that chickens are more likely to add to an existing clutch of eggs than to start a new one. Keep boxes clean, and do not disturb laying chickens. Once nesting boxes are accepted as a safe and serene laying site, chickens will return daily without prodding.
 - To introduce chickens to the nesting box, try putting them in the box at night, when they are blind. They will find their way out in the morning when they are all calm and at ease. This way, they won't forget where to find it later on.
 - Nesting boxes are not meant to be used for sleeping. Encourage your chickens to use nests only for laying.
- 6 Keep any eye on the box.** If your hens aren't using the nesting box, figure out where else they are laying their eggs. Try to understand why they aren't using the nesting box. Consider comfort, safety, and ease of access. Perhaps the box is too small; too high off the ground; too open; too dirty. Make any adjustments that seem necessary to set your chickens at ease.

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Tips

- Take your time. If you rush through the project, the chances of overlooking something or making a mistake are higher.
- Don't leave screw or nail tips exposed where a chicken could injure itself.

- Do not wash your eggs until you're going to eat them, and do not bother to refrigerate them. Chickens put a protective coating on the eggs.
- Make sure there are no drafts. Chickens don't like laying in drafts.

Warnings

- Be careful with the tools. Accidents can happen in a split second. Don't let them happen to you.

Sources and Citations

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2. <http://removeandreplace.com/2013/05/18/how-to-build-a-3-in-1-chicken-hen-nesting-box-diy-step-by-step/>
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