

This Nest is a Mess



Spring and summer are times of bird songs and animals nesting. There are many different types of nest builders in the animal world and none do it quite as dramatically and well as the birds. Some birds don't do much but make a few scrapes on the ground in which to lay their eggs such as turkey vultures and roughed grouse, but many go to great lengths to gather or make materials, construct a safe and elaborate bowl, and pick some of the most seemingly precarious locations but rarely fail. Some birds like Osprey, Bald Eagle and Great Horned Owls will return to the same nesting location year after year if left undisturbed. Other birds like bank swallows and purple martins will nest in colonies. Tree swallows, chickadees, woodpeckers and screech owls will nest in tree cavities. Now let's see how well you can make a bird nest.

Getting Started – It's Easy!

Where: outside or gather materials and try it inside

Materials: natural nesting materials such as dry grass, moss, lichens, small leaves, mud, small twigs, etc. (always gather from the ground don't pick live plants)

Tweezers if you want to try with them as your "bird beak"

Inside: Find a dead branch that has a few small branches close together where you can build your nest, you may want to find a way to wedge it in or stabilize so it doesn't fall over

Outside: find either a dead branch you can move near you or a live branch you can reach with a few small branches close together where you can build your nest

Length of time: 30 minute or longer (depends on materials near and how long you want to try)

Note *This activity takes a little patience and it is okay to not have a perfect nest, birds are experts.*

Let's Begin:

Birds make this task look fairly easy with their slender and agile legs gripping on to a small perching surface, while gently weaving and tucking materials around to shape the cup and walls of the nest. It's not quite as easy as it looks.

Give it a try:

Gather up several handfuls of good nesting materials, small twigs, grasses, leaves, shredded bark, vines or other natural materials. Pick a good branch at an easy to reach height and try to construct a nest using your hands. For young children it might be a good idea for an adult to help. Be sure to not pick any nest materials that are still alive.

Try it Like a Bird:

Now attempt the same activity but this time using only tweezers to hold and manipulate the materials, or just use two fingers to be your "bird beak."

- Which way was easier? Can you think of other methods to construct a better nest? Did you use mud? Look online or in a book to see what materials different bird species use.