

## Gourds and Purple Martins

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The Native Americans placed hollowed gourds in strategic places to attract the Purple Martin. The Purple Martin would warn that grain eating birds were present. Martins prefer to live in gourds, are people friendly, and are very social. They eat only insects. Millions of people have Martin houses made of wood, metal, and plastic but have no Martins. The Martin is naturally attracted to gourd housing. (Try using gourds to entice Martins to your existing house -it does work). Gourds have several qualities that make them the choice as housing.

### ADVANTAGES

Gourds can be grown at home (or purchased very reasonably), they last for years, they have no sharp corners, they are well insulated, and they attract Martins. Once established, a colony will return annually.

### GOURD SELECTION

Use birdhouse gourds and select gourds at least 10 inches in diameter. Martins are social, so prepare four or more gourds.

### GOURD PREPARATION

- Drill a 1/4 inch hole in the upper neck of the gourd for a support wire.
- Make the entrance hole 2 inches in diameter.
- Drill six 1/4 inch holes in the gourd neck for ventilation.
- Drill six 1/4 inch holes in the bottom for drainage.
- Clean out the gourd (the best you can).
- Apply two coats of Thompson Water Seal (4 days apart).
- Allow the water seal to dry, then apply good quality exterior latex paint (white only).
- DO NOT USE A PERCH! Hawks and owls will alight and have lunch.

### PLACEMENT

- Placement is all important. Place within 100 feet of human housing.
- Place in an open space at least 40 feet from any trees.
- The gourds should be at least 10-15 feet above ground.
- Use a single pole with a cross piece to hold the gourds.
- Put the gourds in place about March 25th or when you see Martins.

### CARE FOR THE MARTINS

If you cannot care for the Martins, they will leave.

- Check nests weekly. It is okay to handle young birds.
- Change the nests. When the birds are ten days old or older, replace the nesting materials with cedar shavings (this gets rid of mites).
- If starlings or sparrows build in the gourds, clean out immediately.
- No guy wires can be used; squirrels will climb them.
- Snakes can climb metal poles. Use an inverted funnel shaped guard.

We use a loud radio to deter other birds but this has no effect on Martins. Martins stay inside at night and eat insects during the day.

**FORTY PAIRS OF MARTINS EAT HALF A TON OF INSECTS ANNUALLY!**

There are a lot of web sites that have invaluable information. Simply type "purple martin" using your favorite search engine.

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