

Building Scientific Bird Houses For Fun And Profit

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Building Scientific Bird Houses For Fun And Profit

Build and sell attractive standard model and custom birdhouses and bird feeders that are scientifically designed for specific species.

This business requires a wood shop and basic woodworking tools, paint, some basic knowledge of carpentry and birds, but not much else. It can be a very pleasant and uncomplicated but highly rewarding business.

To be effective, you need to know something about the birds in your area -- when they nest, what size houses, entry holes, whether one or more nest in the same area, and of course, how high off the ground they must be mounted.

If you aren't qualified bird-watchers don't worry - you can only build one type of birdhouse at a time anyway and you can find out all you need to know about the bird's nesting needs at your local library.

As you learn new bird house patterns, you can study up on the birds -- one species at a time. When your houses are ready to sell, you will be able to tell your customers all about that particular bird, what it eats, needs, where to place and how to take care of the birds and their birdhouse.

You can start with a single pattern or blueprint. These are available from many sources (some are listed below), which will be for one bird species. You are free to alter the patterns and colors so long as you maintain the basics -- keep the entries large enough for the target bird, but too small for predators.

Provide cleverly disguised trap doors for cleaning, different styles of perches and roofs and of course, a variety of color combinations and/or designs.

There are enough variables to allow you to make your own style of birdhouse for any species and still retain the required features.

Check with the local lumber yards to find the best quality and prices on materials. You cannot use some types of treated lumber due to its odor or even toxicity of the birds at close quarters, but you can use a silicone sealer like Thompson's (to prevent rapid weathering).

Let the lumber yard know you can use odd-sized pieces (which should be considerably cheaper) and many kinds of scraps. A variety of woods will serve you nicely -- then you can offer a variety of birdhouse models.

Arrange your working area to have separate places for sawing/sanding and painting operations. Experiment with building, assembling, painting and decorating techniques.

Make jigs and patterns for cutting out and fitting the pieces as close to assembly line fashion as possible. Cut out or buy stencils for decorative patterns (Dover has some nice, inexpensive ones - see Business Sources).

Build your birdhouses with hinged roofs or panels so they can be opened and cleaned each season - birdhouses that are not cleaned are seldom used again.

Commercially available, assembly line (most are put together with unfinished wood and staples) birdhouses and feeders start at about \$5 each, but they are very poor quality at that price.

They are made with obvious scraps, some of which will not hold up outside (e.g. inside grade plywood and paneling) - and unpainted or treated.

You can get a much better price with attractive scientifically designed and well colorfully decorated.

Commercial birdhouses seldom specify the type bird they are designed for -- or how high it should be mounted. The reason is simple: they don't want to limit their sales!

You should start with the understanding that you cannot build and sell birdhouses as cheap as the discount stores. You can, however, offer better ones at nearly their price -- and make good money.

Since your bird houses are scientifically built for a particular species of bird, you should provide a little info sheet with each house. tell a little about the bird, its habits and history, and how to get results with the bird house.

This info sheet should be no more than one standard sheet -- perhaps an 8 x 11 sheet folded to make two inside pages, each 8 x 5 1/2. The cover could have a title and silhouette of the bird, the back, plain. You can have a little booklets printed inexpensively (see Business Sources section).

Since you need to find out a little about the bird anyway to build the correct birdhouse, you already have most of the information. This little gimmick alone can help you get a dollar or two more for each birdhouse!

You can market your birdhouses and feeders through ads, bulletin boards and posters that feed stores or pet shops allow you to

post. You can sell them at flea markets, at a stand along the road, or advertise them in the paper.

Check with real estate agent for a vacant store and arrange to rent a show window until the store is leased.

Set up a display there for your birdhouses and have a sign that tells people where they can get them.

Take pictures, make up a scrapbook of your different models, add prices and offer to wholesale them to pet shops and stores, or arrange to place them on consignment.

You can even advertise in bird watcher.

If you want to be different or expand your business, offer do-it-yourself kits with assembly, directions and all the parts, nails, hinges, glue, stencils and possibly even paint.

These could be sold for about half the cost of a completed bird house. Your instructions would be included in a plastic bag, along with the same little info booklet mentioned above.

Other possible variations are to paint the birdhouses in patterns to match each other, or the customer's home; selling mounting and/or squirrel guards and other intruder accessories; mounting them, and custom designs (if you are artistically inclined, otherwise fancy stencils).

About the only problem area in this business would be to build too many birdhouses for unpopular birds (like sparrows).

If this is a consideration, it might be a good idea to build several models and see which ones sell best before going into mass production of any one model.

BUSINESS SOURCES

DOVER PUBLICATIONS, 31 E. 2nd St., Mineola, NY 11501, 516/294-7000. Discount books, including reference books (birdhouse patterns), stencil decorations and many types of bird books.

PUBLISHERS CENTRAL BUREAU, Box 1197, Newark, NJ 07102. Discount books, including reference.

MARSH FARMS, Box 7, Garden Grove, CA 92642. Birds, equipment and instructions books.

ZPS, Box 581, Libertyville, IL 60048-2556. Business card, letterhead stationery, etc. Will print your camera-ready logo or

design, even whole card.

QUILL CORPORATION, 100 Schelter Rd., Lincolnshire, IL 60917-4700.
Office supplies.

IVEY PRINTING, Box 761, Meridan, TX 76665. Write for price list.

SWEDCO, Box 29, Mooresville, NC 28115. Three line rubber stamps.
Write for free catalog.

NEBS, 500 Main St., Groton, MA 04171, 800/225-6380. Office
supplies.

WALTER DRAKE, 4119 Drake Bldg., Colorado Springs, CO 80940. Short
run business cards and other stationery products. No choice of
color or style, but good quality.

OLYMPIA PRINTING, 1282 Monomoy, Aurora, IL 60506. Business cards
and letterhead. Write for price list.