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Feathered friends need customized homes, too

A bird house, like any home, is only comfortable if it suits the temperament and life style of its occupants.

Build a house (or buy one) that has a small entrance hole and you discourage starlings and sparrows (that's good).

Put a martin house in the shade and you discourage martins (that's bad).

Martins are a congenial bird, who like to live as many as 200 birds in one "apartment" house. Their home, painted white to reflect the light rays, should be placed in direct sunlight.

Wrens and titmice nest in shady spots near a building or in the woods, while robins forsake covered houses for nesting platforms under an eve or against a tree.

There are, however, certain basic bird house designs which all 50 North American bird species who nest in birdhouses prefer.

The sturdiest birdhouses are made of ¾ inch wood, while larger, many storied martin houses have only ½ inch thick walls to lighten the weight.

Hardwoods such as redwood and seasoned oak may be used "as is." Softwoods such as white pine or

whitecedar weather better if painted or stained.

Any bird house should be constructed with a removable side for cleaning purposes. Roofs should be unhinged so as to be watertight, but drainage holes should be drilled in the floor of the home and several others each side under the roof for cross ventilation.

The entrance hole should always be located in the upper half of the house so that small nestlings are out of reach of cat or squirrel.

In the same manner, landing perches are unnecessary and dangerous because of possible predators.

Bird houses atop poles can be protected by placing a cuff around the pole.

Homes can be made more attractive by lining them with moss, straw or wood shavings.

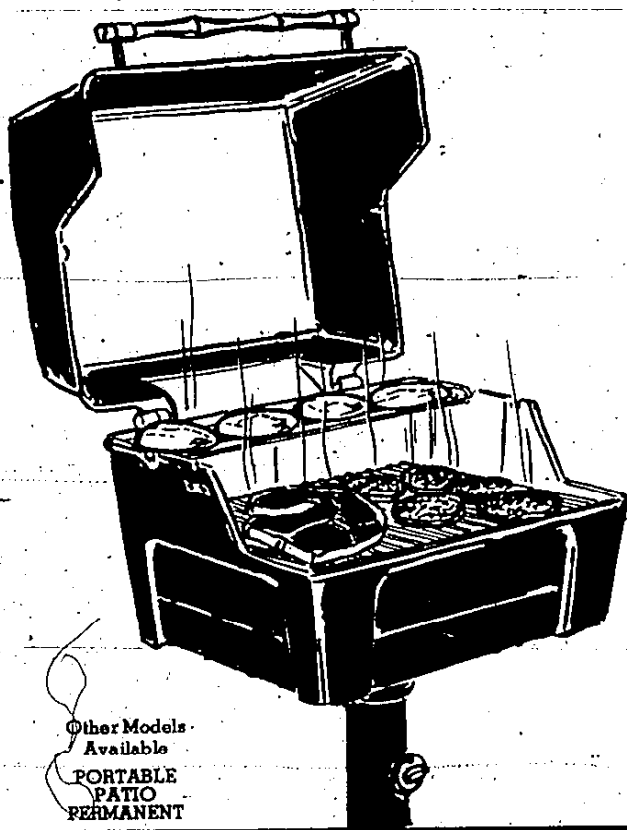
Homes should be positioned so that the entrance hole faces the south, away from the winds.

If you want to hear young chirps this summer, homes should be up around your yard early in the spring.

After the bird house has been vacated, the box should be cleaned out, deloused and made ready for another cycle of nesting.

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