

# Purple Martin house repairs and construction

Its late January and the rush is on to repair, paint and clean the gourds and houses for the up coming season. Charles and Phil are in the workshop near the woodstove on a Saturday morning assembling new side walls and base floors of the 18 compartment purple martin house, the largest in the colony. The large house was constructed about 5 years ago and has served well, but late summer heat and early fall rains take a toll on wooden houses. The birds leave the nesting area on or about August the 20<sup>th</sup> each year and the nesting boxes need to be taken down and clean immediately or rot will set in. The houses were down by late October this year and all debris was removed and the units were stored in the storage house. We have finally got around to making the repairs. New bottoms were installed this year constructed of A-C plywood and holes drilled using the old bottoms for templates. The new sides are being made from  $\frac{3}{4}$  clear pine and holes drilled with a 2 inch hole saw for the entrance. Stainless steel # 6 x 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  flathead screws are used to fasten the sides to the bottom. Lewon plywood is cut and notched to make the compartment dividers that fit into the channel cut on the side walls.

We still like the traditional wooden houses because they have always been filled with birds since the 1960's. I learned to make this type of box from an old carpenter who told us that the style was around this area for many years. Somerset County Maryland has always had abundant supplies of mosquitoes because of our vast marshlands. Native Americans apparently attracted the Martins with natural gourds. There is a great reward for all the effort that goes into the construction and repair of the martin house. On or about April the first that dark blue male will be singing in the garden in the back yard and we will know that spring has arrived.

Painting is a big issue with regard to Purple Martin nesting boxes. One it is usually cold weather when we make repairs and paint refuses to dry and sometimes remains tacky for days. Latex primers don't hold up well and oil base retains an odor for weeks. With that said we have learned to use some of the new fast drying oil base primers that dry within hours and two top coats of Latex semi gloss house paint for finish. All this painting needs to be completed by February 15<sup>th</sup> to give time for all the strong odors to subside. I also recommend that the inside of the compartments not be painted.













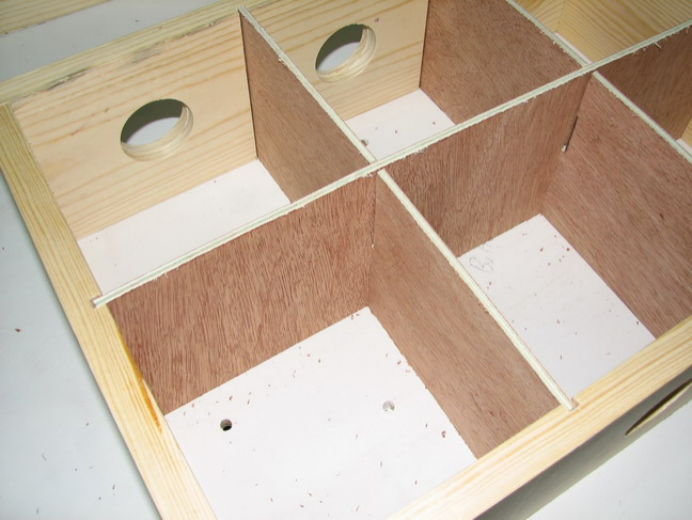
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