Making a Bird Table

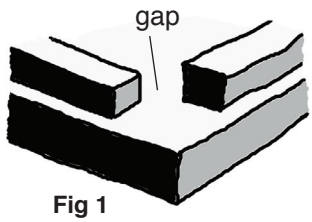


Fig 1

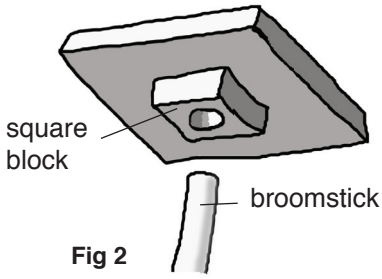


Fig 2

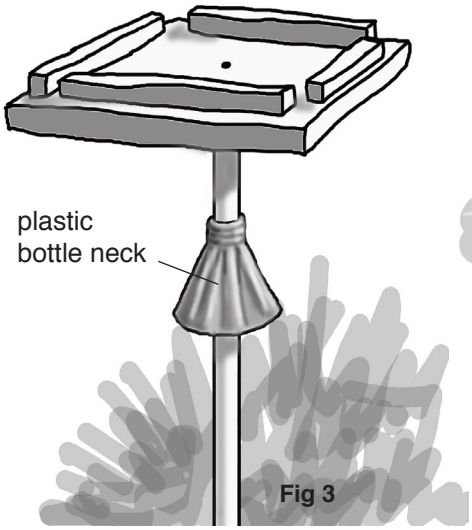


Fig 3

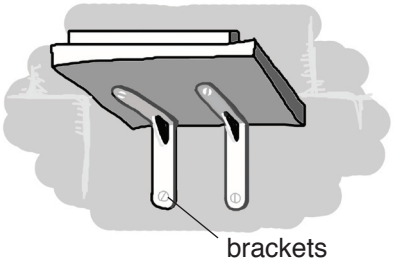


Fig 4

Bird tables come in many shapes and sizes. Some look like cottages, others like gothic cathedrals! But the simplest are the best - birds are not finicky about detail. A bird table is basically a tray where to spread food scraps. Here's how to make a simple but successful table.

- You need a piece of wood or composite board about 30x20cm (size of this page) and about 1-2cm thick. This will be the table top.
- Take four thin (1cm^2) wooden strips, each a bit shorter than the edges of the table. Nail, screw or glue them around the edge of your table, leaving gaps at the ends (Fig. 1). These strips will keep food from rolling off the table when it's windy, while the gaps will let rainwater drain away. The strips also serve as perches for birds.
- Treat the board with wood preservative if you can. This will extend the life of your bird table. Let it dry out well before using it. Don't paint or varnish, as these coats will flake and mix with the food.
- Take a broomstick about 150cm long and screw or nail it to the table top. If this is tricky or looks flimsy, stick a small block of wood to the base of the table, bore a round hole in its middle and fit one end of the broomstick snugly into that (Fig. 2).
- Bring the other end of the broomstick to a point. Coat the bottom third of the broomstick with paint, tar or stand it in wood preservative for a night. This will protect the wood from soil damp, so be generous with your coatings. To keep snails from raiding your bird table, cut off the conical neck of a plastic bottle and wedge it halfway up your broomstick, wide end facing down (Fig. 3).
- That's basically it! Now find a well-lit spot in your garden, where the bird table can be observed from a distance. Stick the pointed end of the broomstick into the soil and make sure it's steady - maybe it will need some firm hammering with a mallet. Make very sure not to put it where a cat might pounce on it, so place it at least 2m from the nearest tree or low wall. If you don't have a soil patch, stand the bird table in a bucket of soil, sand or gravel. Alternatively, do away with the broomstick altogether and fix the table to a wall, using brackets (Fig. 4). Again, place it well away from where a cat might ambush.
- Start piling it with food scraps. Try different foods, e.g. cake crumbs, pastizzi (the fattier the better), crushed peanuts (unsalted), sesame seeds, raisins, biscuits, chopped cooked bacon rind, cooked rice, and halved fruits like figs, prickly pears, pomegranates etc. Avoid bread or crackers which are too dry. Keep the table top clean: if you try out food which sticks to your table top, scrape it off later.
- Come spring, stop stocking the bird table. Let the birds revert to their natural food, which by now should be again in good supply, and vital for a healthy nesting family!

Resist the tempatation to give the bird table a roof. Experience has shown us that birds are afraid of such structures and will take longer to get used to a roofed bird table.

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