

BUG BOX

Neil Lawton shows us how to make several variations of bug boxes using just a few simple timber offcuts

As any gardener knows, there are insects and there are insects. There are those that see your flowers and carefully nurtured crops as an abundant supply of food, and those who prey on them.

Increasing suitable habitat for these beneficial predators should hopefully increase the population, leading to a natural fall in numbers of the undesirables, without resorting to nasty chemicals and spraying away the good, as well as the bad.

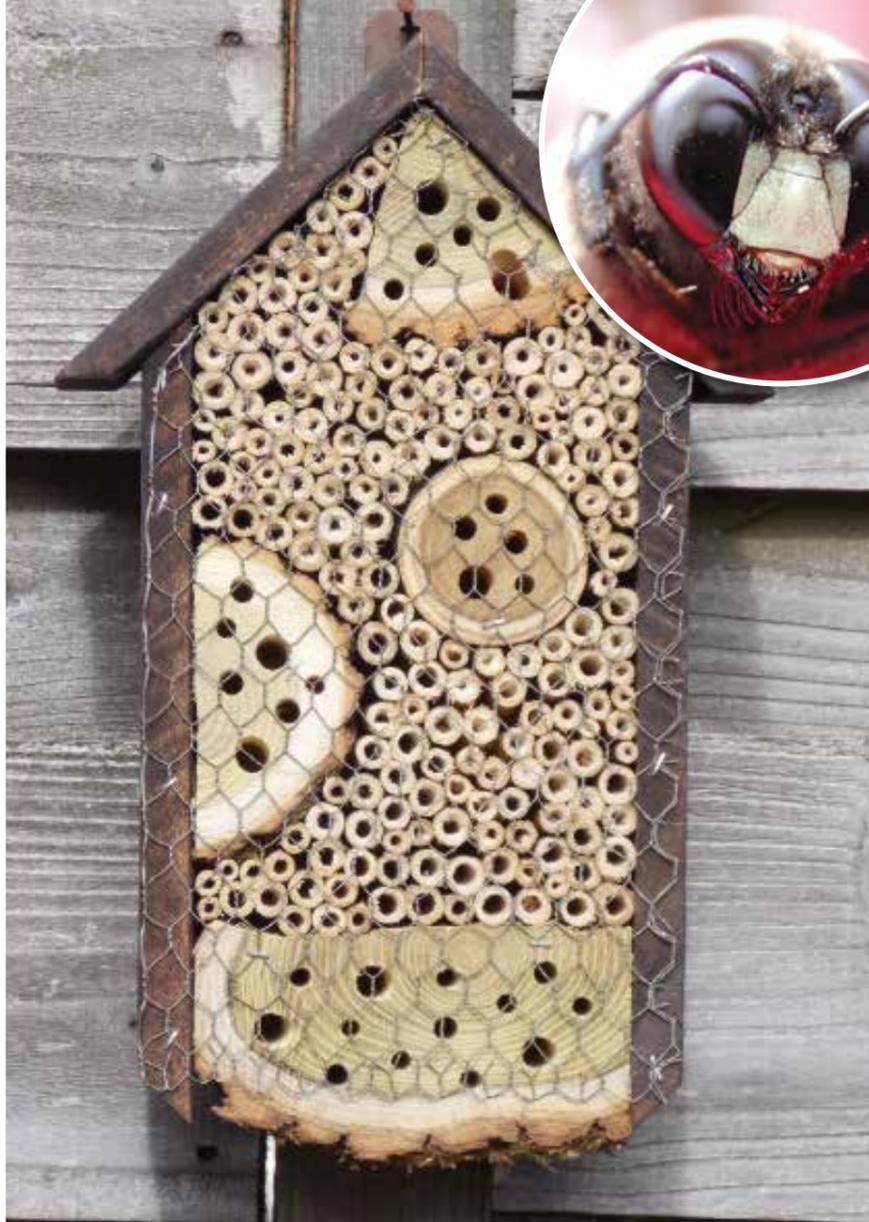
Bug boxes are an easy and tidy way of providing more living space for these creatures, without resorting to piles of twigs, etc. around the garden. There are many other materials and designs that can be utilised, but I am once again using reclaimed timber and whatever I have to hand.

1 For this box, I am using pallet wood, some logs from the burning pile and bamboo garden canes.

2 With the saw set at 45°, a mitre is cut on one end of the pieces, which will form the sides and the roof. I'm using the tablesaw here, but a mitre saw would suffice.

3 A stop block is clamped to the cross-cut fence to ensure that the paired components are cut to the same length. It's not too crucial for this project, but very handy when making enclosed boxes and picture frames.

4 Lay out the pieces to establish the working width – the sides can join the roof in any position and can be adjusted to suit the filling materials you have available.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY NEIL LAWTON, UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED

What you will need:

- Pieces of pallet wood 16mm-thick
- Ply back: 6mm-thick
- Roof parts: 166mm from the long edge of the mitre and 87mm wide
- Sides: 272mm to the long edge and 75mm wide
- Back - ply - is 180mm wide and approximately 330 from the apex to the bottom

Above left: Eastern Carpenter bee – male (*Xylocopa*)

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

5 For the back of the box, cut a piece to width. I used ply as I have a quantity of offcuts, but you could build the back up using sections of pallet wood. The next step is to glue and pin the roof sections together. A small mitre clamp was used to keep the pieces in line and to stop them sliding away from each other.

7 With a centreline marked on the back, the roof section can be used as a template to mark the cut lines.

8 The basic box can then be just glued and pinned together.

9 Charring the timber with a blow torch will remove the rough sawn finish and provide you with better weatherproofing. Brushing the timber with a brass bristled brush will remove excess char and give a smooth finish. Always carry out this process well away from other flammable material – ideally outside, if possible, wearing the necessary PPE.

10 Measure up for the log, which will form the bottom of the box.

11 The log I had chosen had been split on a hydraulic log splitter. There was a high spot, which made it a little unstable to bandsaw. This was removed with a plane, but chisels or a sander can be used to obtain a more stable surface.

12 Next, using a flat cut on one side, the log can then be cut to fit. Using the first offcut, as well as a pushstick, will keep your hands well clear of the blade.

13 The more stable log can now be cut to suit the depth of the bug box. ▶



14 Lay out the pieces, trying different positions, until you find one you are happy with.

15 Secure the pieces in place. I used a nail gun here, but a hammer and nails or screws could be used.

16 A selection of HSS drill bits were chosen to suit and the appropriate depth marked using masking tape.

17 A series of holes can then be drilled into the various logs. Using these drills ensures that no great problems will occur if you hit one of the securing nails.

18 Next, cut the bamboo to length. These could be cut by hand in bunches, as the length is not too critical. If machine cut, it is essential to use a V-block and ensure they are cut singly. A 'roundish' piece can easily rotate with the cut and either fly back at you, or potentially pull your hands towards the blade.

19 Start to fill in the spaces with the bamboo. A few different sized blocks of wood will help you contain it, without it falling over.

20 Keep repositioning the blocks until there is no large area unfilled.

21 Once the blocks are removed, gently tap more bamboo into the loose areas.

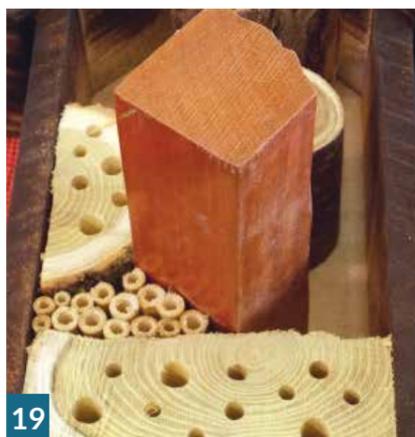
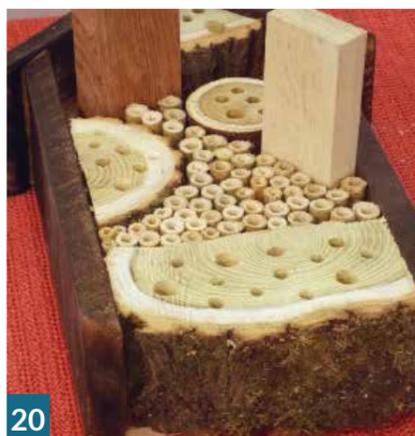
Advice from RSPB

Insects will use man-made structures in which to lay eggs, or to hibernate in through the winter, either as an adult or larvae. Bundles of tubes provide somewhere for insects to lay eggs or to hibernate in. The hollow stems of bamboo or hogweed are ideal. Gather tubes into a bundle and secure together.

Ensure one end is blocked off so the tubes do not become a wind tunnel.

Web: www.rspb.org.uk

Boxelder bug (*Boisea trivittata*)



22 This may cause previously tight feeling areas to become loose. Keep checking for movement until you can turn the box over, with nothing falling out.

23 Staple some small mesh wire over the box. Small birds will quite happily try and pull out the contents in their foraging!

24 Bend back any sharp edges of the wire and staple in place.

25 The hanger was fashioned by filing a V-notch in an old table expansion bracket – I try to recycle where I can!

26 The finished article – a home for all those beneficial insects!

27-28 Here you can see a few variations on the theme. These were made from hardwood offcuts and were photographed prior to wiring. Why not let your imagination run free and create your own habitat for those beneficial bugs today! ■



Attracting bugs
Ladybirds like to hibernate in the nooks and crannies in dead wood, and you can buy artificial homes that mimic this. Ladybirds are particularly important for controlling aphids.
Right: Ladybird (*Coccinellidae*)



Neil Lawton
Neil is a woodworker/turner who specialises in the use of reclaimed and recycled materials in his projects and seasons native timbers for his turning work. He works from his home workshop in York and works part time in the Design Technology department of the local school.



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