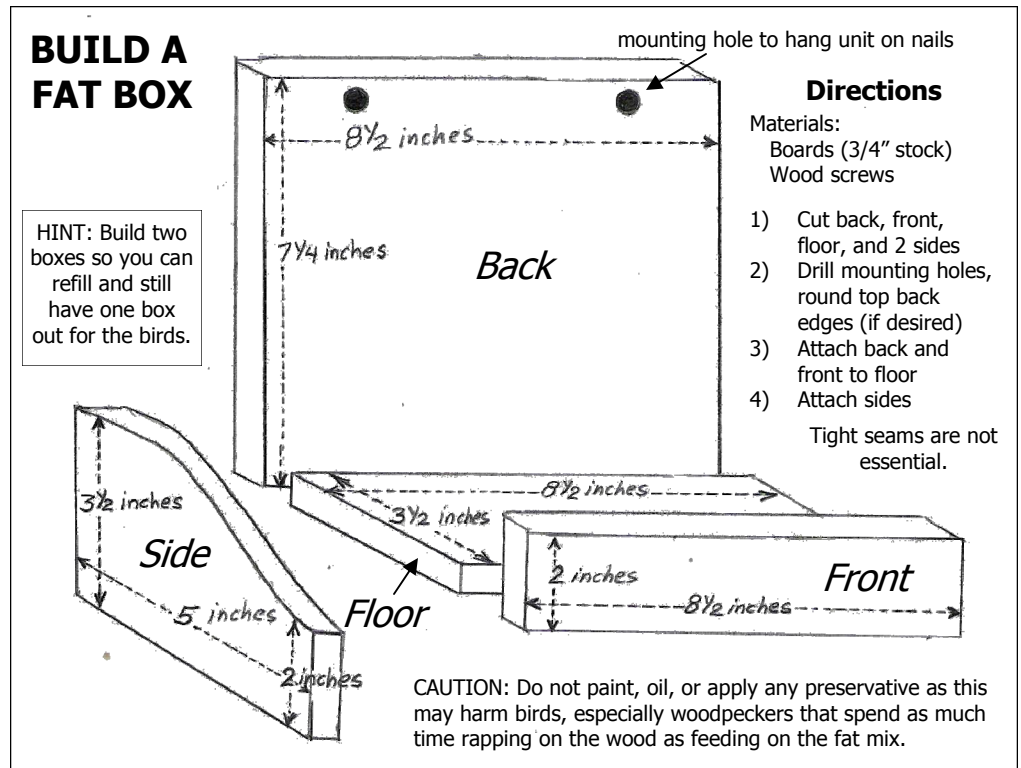


Are Pine Martins stealing your suet? Are blue jays and gray jays ripping holes in suet bag netting so suet chunks drop into the eager control of squirrels? Are you disappointed when the chickadees, woodpeckers and nuthatches arrive and there isn't anything left for them? If you are like me, you really do enjoy pine martins, squirrels, and jays, so what to do?

Metal cages designed to hold suet cakes can be purchased, but over a winter that can become expensive. Logs with fat-filled holes also work but have pretty limited capacity and not all birds or mammals we like to see will use these readily. We needed something we could make ourselves, would be easy to maintain, and would be inviting to all the critters we enjoy watching. In 1980 my husband, Ken, and I developed a simple wood box, the Fat Box, as an alternative. Using Fat Boxes ensures that small birds always have a high energy food source while still accommodating raucous jays, mischievous squirrels, and pine martins. So here is a plan for constructing a Fat Box and a recipe that will fill it perfectly.



RECIPE TO FILL ONE FAT BOX:

Melt one pound (1 box) of lard, stir in 2 cups of uncooked rolled oats, cool to a spreading consistency, and spread into your newly constructed Fat Box. Cool further until the fat is stiff to preclude problems with messy fat getting on bird feathers and feet. Melting lard is not a job for children because of the danger of starting a fire with spilled lard. Once the oat-lard mix cools, however, it is fun to smear the fat into the Fat Box or add additional ingredients as suggested in the note below. To make it an easy job with little cleanup we use an old heavy saucepan dedicated to melting lard. After using a spatula to clean the last bits of lard off the pan we let a dog finish the job and keep the pan in a shed reserved for that duty only. Yes, we are that lazy and don't enjoy greasy pans to wash and, besides, the dog seems to approve!

NOTE: If you have favorite ingredients your birds enjoy, incorporate them into the lard mix. Replace part of the lard with peanut butter or grease drippings or add sunflower hearts or peanut bits, etc...

Winter feeder birds that use Fat Boxes include downy, hairy, and pileated woodpeckers, red-breasted and white-breasted nuthatches, black-capped and boreal chickadees, blue jays and gray jays, and if you have a resident winter crow or are in town, you can add crows and starlings to the list. They also attract an interesting bunch of mammals including red squirrels, gray squirrels, pine martin, and fisher.