

NEWS RELEASE
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KESTREL HOUSE

BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

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Based on the interest in our article on bluebird houses, here is another idea. The American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) is a small falcon that feeds on insects, reptiles, and small mammals such as mice and voles. Although present in Mariposa County, removal of dead trees and old buildings have reduced nesting sites. Fortunately, Kestrels take well to houses you can build.

The USDA has prepared a leaflet on Kestrel houses, with both plans and instructions. According to this leaflet, good locations are open fields and meadows or along fence rows. Houses can be mounted on utility poles, buildings, lone trees, or your own post. The house should face south or east. Pick a location where a tall tree or pole and wire is within 100 to 200 yards, as Kestrels like high perches near the house. The house should be 10 to 15 feet from the ground and the entrance should not be hindered by twigs or branches, as the Kestrel prefers an uninhibited exit from the house. Winter is the best time to erect a Kestrel house.

When picking your house location, keep in mind that the house needs to be cleaned and checked periodically. Therefore, do not erect it where it is impossible to reach later – with a ladder or from your vehicle. An alternative to ladders is to put up your own post (an eight-foot-long 4 x 4 attached to a twelve-foot-long 2 x 4) with six-inch bolts to enable you to swing the house down. It is often difficult to find a tree or pole facing the right direction which isn't miles

from your car! With your own post, you can dig a hole wherever you find an ideal spot. The height of the box can be 14 to 15 feet from the ground.

It is very important to check the house weekly in the spring to keep Starlings and other undesirables out of the house. Kestrels take no nesting materials into the house, so 2 to 3 inches of wood shavings or coarse sawdust should be put into the house. Straw or dry leaves are acceptable. Screech owls also will use a Kestrel house and are desirable tenants. They also bring no nesting materials, so any nesting material found in the house will almost certainly be Starling material and should be removed. Starlings are persistent, so check the house at least weekly during the nesting season. (Starling eggs are pale blue, Screech Owl eggs are white, and Kestrel eggs are white/cinnamon colored with spots of brown, and four to six in number).

Supply List:

(1) 6-foot x 1-inch x 10-inch redwood or cedar board

(1) 13-inch x 1-inch x 12-inch top board

#4 coated box nails

(2) hinges and (1) latch

15 foot high tree or support post

For a free copy of “Kestrel House – Plans and Instructions,” call the UCCE office in Mariposa at (209) 966-2417.

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