

water: the second requirement

The food supply of birds must be complemented by an abundant supply of fresh water. Birds need water for drinking and bathing. Since they use the same water for both purposes, separate containers are not necessary.

In the natural surroundings of birds, water is supplied by brooks, ponds, rain puddles, swamps, dew, and snow. Thus they have more than enough sources of water. But in the average city or suburban lot there are not enough sources of water. To attract and keep birds, an ample supply must be provided.

pools

If you live in the country and have enough room for a bird sanctuary, a watering place for birds can be very easily provided by simply hollowing out a small dish-shaped area in the ground and filling it with water. This unit can become a part of the landscaping by lining the depression with cement and making a small ornamental pool. Do not make the pool too deep. Birds rarely will use a pool or a birdbath that is more than 2 or 3 inches deep. Have the sides at a very flat slope so that entry is easy. The birds will approach the pool more freely if there are no nearby bushes that could hide enemies. Have at least 3 to 4 feet of open space around the pool. Use grass in this area or, better, fine sand and dust for a natural dust bath. These pools can vary in size from 3 to 10 feet across, depending upon the space you can devote to them. The chief objections to this kind of pool are that it occupies too much space in the average yard and is very difficult to clean.

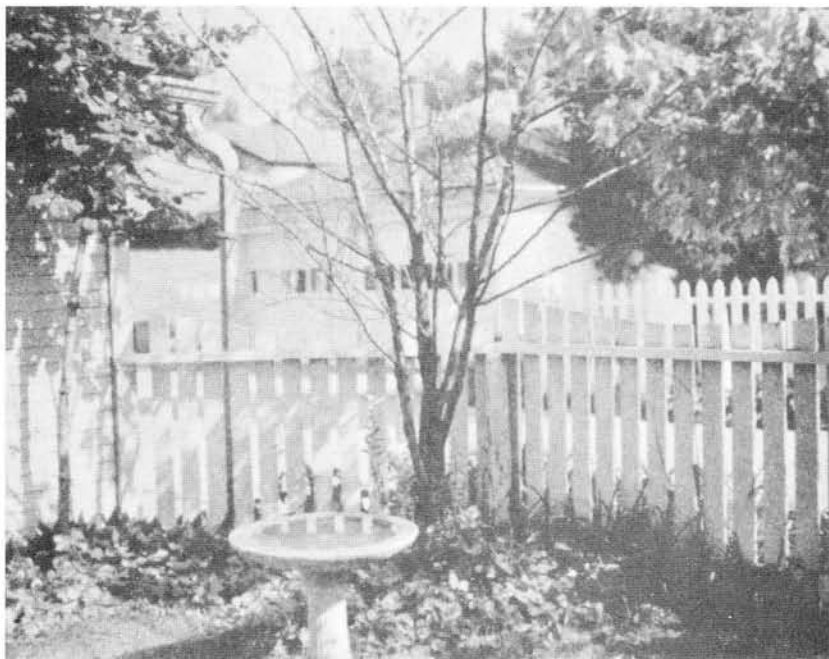
If you are fortunate enough to have a small stream or a running spring on your land, the pool described above can be made a part of it. Widen a section of the stream, give the sides a very gradual slope, provide the grass or dust area, remove close bushes and shrubs, and you will have an excellent, natural bird-watering place.

While bushes should be removed from the area immediately surrounding the pool, have a fence, open bush, dead tree, or overhanging branches about 10 feet away to serve as a place for the birds to rest and preen themselves. Locate the pool and preening perch where they will get both sunshine and shade and the birds will use them constantly.



A shallow pool with sloping sides and lined with concrete is welcomed by the birds.

Leafie Watt—From the National Audubon Society



A dead tree near a bird bath provides an excellent preening place for birds.

the birdbath

Perhaps the common birdbath is the most practical means of providing water for birds. Baths made of terra cotta can be purchased at very reasonable prices. Those made of concrete are more expensive but last longer and are more durable. Regardless of the material of which the birdbath is made, be sure that it is designed correctly. Many of the birdbaths available are too deep and the sides are too steep. The baths should not be more than 3 inches deep and the sides should slope down gradually. The surface of the bowl and edge should be rough to provide a good footing.

On the following pages are instructions for casting a concrete birdbath by the sweep method. The pedestal is of poured concrete. The construction is simple and will be a very interesting experience if you have not worked with concrete before. Once the forms have been made, it is a simple matter to make additional birdbaths. The bowl can be placed on the concrete pedestal or it can be set on a stump if there happens to be one in a good location. You can also place it on a brick pedestal or any suitable mount.

Like pools, birdbaths should be carefully located in an open space with a fence or branches about 10 feet away.

how to make a concrete birdbath

A simple and inexpensive way to make a concrete birdbath is shown here. The bowl is formed with sweeps that mold the core and the concrete to shape. Select a level, flat surface on which to mount a piece of tarred building paper about 36 inches square. Tack it in place at the edges. Drill a hole at the exact center for the $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch pivot, which may be a wood dowel or iron rod and insert the pivot.

Cut the sweep for the core out of $1\frac{1}{8}$ -inch stock as shown. The bowl is cast or swept upside down. The core is made of clay. To use less clay, you can build up the core out of waste lumber as illustrated. Over this core spread the clay, which should be soft enough to shape easily. Place the sweep on the pivot and work it back and forth until the core is shaped. Allow the core to dry partially and coat it with grease or oil.

When the clay has set, mix the concrete, one part cement to three parts sand and gravel. Keep it rather thick so that it can be formed.

Add the second spacer block, put the concrete over the clay mold, and sweep it into shape. Small pieces of chicken wire can be added as reinforcement. When shaped, trowel the concrete smooth and allow it to harden. After the concrete has set, remove it from the board, and take out the clay core. Round the edges with a brick; then take out the wood spacer block in the center and plug the hole with cement.

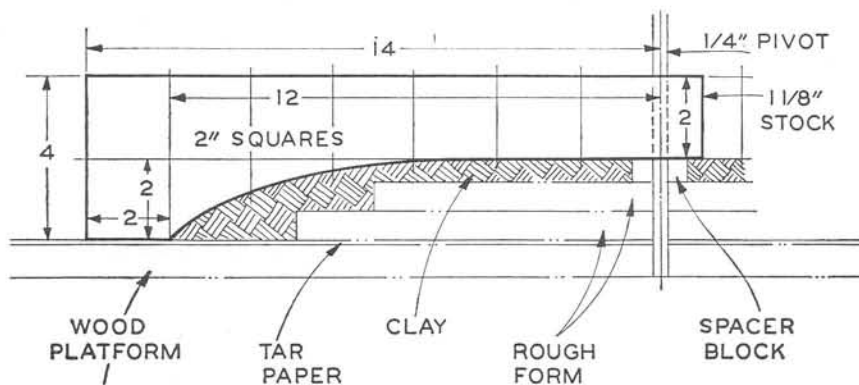
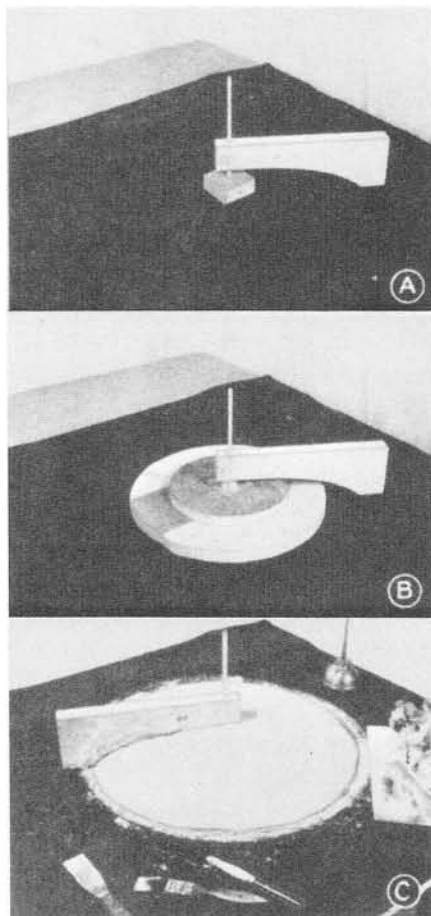
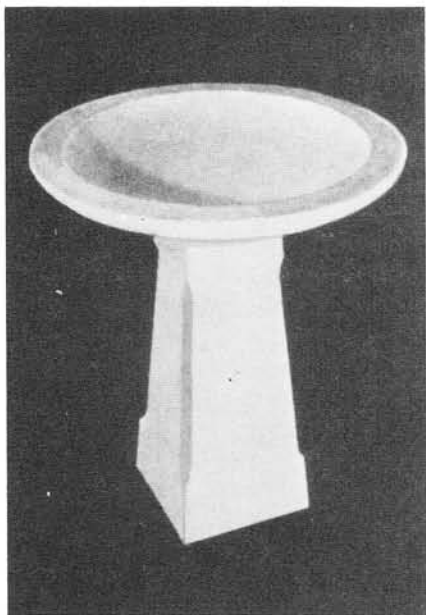
Maintenance of the birdbath is an interesting home chore for the youngsters.



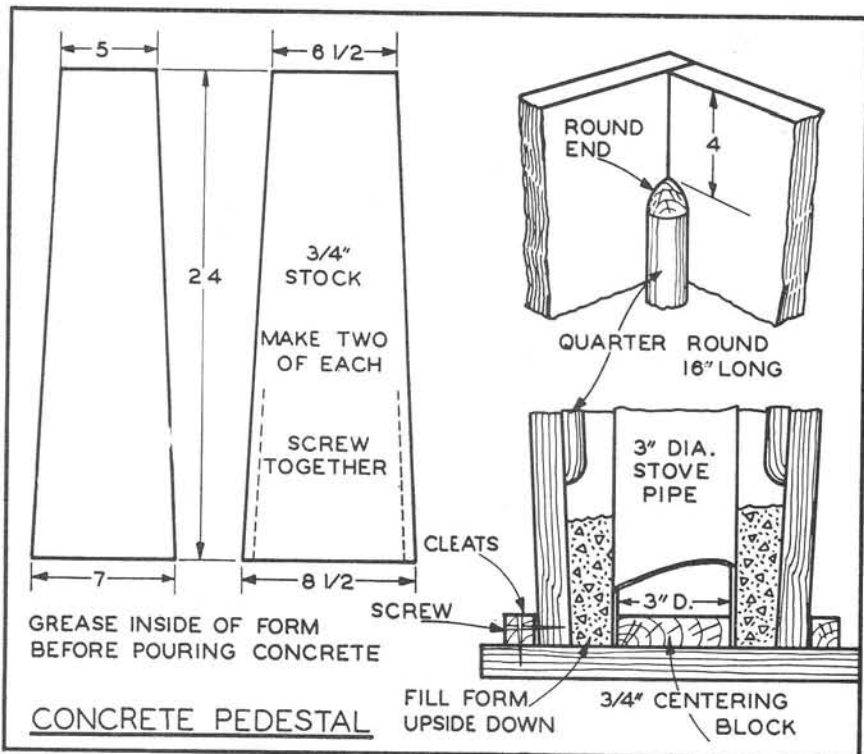
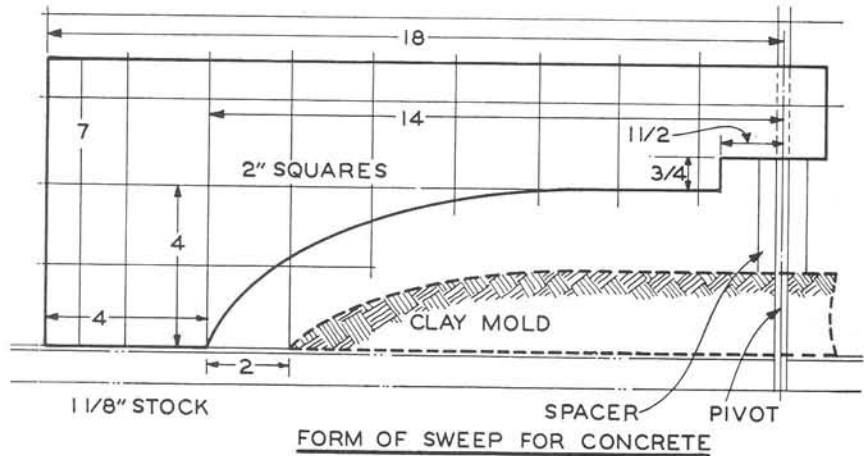
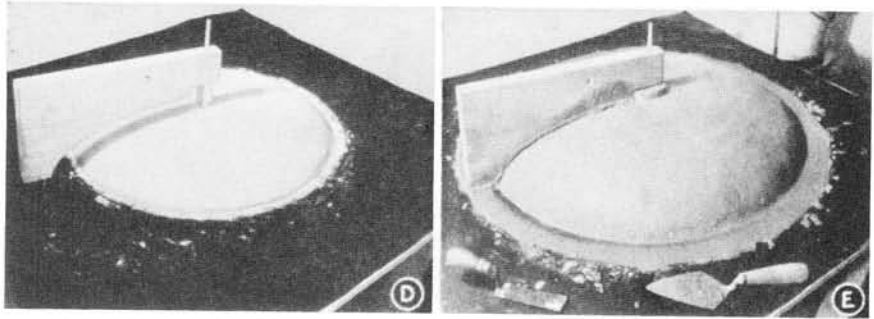
CONCRETE BIRD BATH

MADE WITH SWEEPS

1 PART CEMENT
3 PARTS SAND



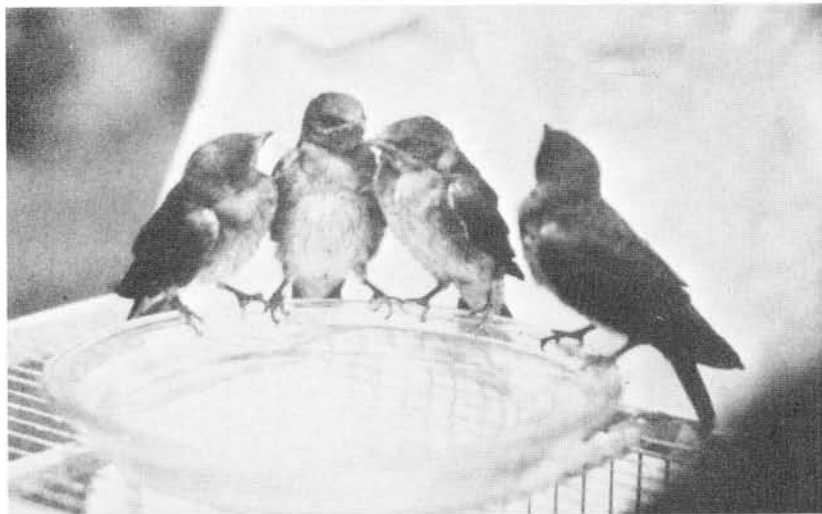
FORM OF SWEEP FOR CLAY MOLD



The pedestal is made upside down and is cast. Make the box form as shown on the drawing. To form the hollow center, a 3-inch diameter stovepipe is used as a core. Mount the 3-inch round centering block, put the pipe over it, and then locate the box form around this assembly. One-inch quarter rounds with rounded ends are nailed inside the box to form the corner cove of the finished pedestal. Oil or grease the inside of the mold and pipe. Screw cleats around the form to hold it in place. Then pour the concrete using a rod to eliminate air bubbles.

Color can be added to the concrete if desired. Your local dealer will tell you how much is required to obtain the color you like. The lug on the bottom of the bowl will hold the bowl to the top of the pedestal.

other ways of providing water



A convenient water supply attracts birds old and young.

Milwaukee Public Museum Photo

There are many other ways of providing a birdbath. They are not all as elaborate as those just described. For example, you can use large earthenware pie plates or an ordinary flowerpot setter. The sides of the latter are a bit steep but it will serve the purpose. Any shallow dish or receptacle will do.

The trickle and splash of falling water is an attraction for birds.



Gene Heil—from the National Audubon Society

Birdbaths can be very elaborate, approximating the formal jet fountains in public parks. Many of these are more decorative than practical. However, a fountain with a jet of water has an attraction for birds. They are fascinated by the trickle and splash of water as you will discover if you provide a fountain in your birdbath, pool, or fountain. Most of the formal birdbaths have permanent water connections and the water must be turned off during freezing weather. The drains, too, must be looked after.

care of birdbaths

Whether a birdbath is simple or elaborate, it must be kept clean. Flush it out every other day and fill it with clean water. You will thus prevent the formation of algae, which not only makes the water unfit for use but also causes an odor. The formation of algae in larger pools and baths can also be prevented by adding one ounce of copper sulfate to every 50 gallons of water. No harmful effects to birds from this solution have ever been noted. Scrub the bowl with a wire brush or with sand and a piece of burlap at least once a week.

winter care

Unless there has been a very dry spell and there is no snow or ice on the ground, it is not necessary to provide water for the birds during the winter. Since birds do not bathe in

freezing temperatures, they require water only for drinking and only a very small amount. If a birdbath is maintained during the winter months, the water must be kept from freezing or the bowl will crack. The simplest way to prevent this is to empty the water each day before it has a chance to freeze solid. A birdbath with an electric heater element in it will also keep the water from freezing. Some resourceful craftsmen devise their own heated birdbaths using the element from a discarded toaster. Other bird fanciers place an electric-light bulb in the pedestal base which, when lit, throws off just enough heat to keep the water from freezing. Experimenting with ways of heating birdbaths may prove interesting to you.

the bird dust bath

In addition to water baths, birds also need dust baths. Dust baths rid birds of skin parasites, not lice, as is commonly believed. Fine dust acts also like talcum powder to condition their feathers.

Any shallow tray or box can be used for a dust bath. A box 2 feet wide, 3 feet long, and 2 inches deep is very practical for this purpose. Fill it with ordinary dry dust—road dust is best—and keep the dust dry. Place the dust bath near the birdbath in the sun and one bird after another will make use of it. Ordinary powdered yellow sulphur can be used as a parasiticide. Add one part sulphur to ten parts of dust.

