



A subadult male Purple Martin bringing a green leaf into a Crescent-holed SuperGourd equipped with our new, optional, inner/outer porch

The SuperGourd

Designed, Manufactured, and Distributed by



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Introducing the SuperGourd

For over 30 years, I, (James R. Hill, III, Founder and Executive Director Emeritus of the *Purple Martin Conservation Association*), have been conducting research on the reproductive success and housing preferences of Purple Martins. In the beginning, one of my goals was to design the ultimate martin house. When my research revealed that, on average, martins fledge ONE extra nestling per nesting attempt in gourds compared to aluminum martin houses with 6" x 6" compartments, I realized that the ultimate martin house is actually a GOURD. In 1997, I created the "SuperGourd," the first-ever artificial gourd with a screw-off access cap. I have been constantly improving the gourd ever since. It now comes with a heavy-duty access cap and an optional, heavy-duty, inner/outer porch. The SuperGourd is available in three entrance hole types:

- 2-1/8" round for Purple Martins
- 1-1/2" round for bluebirds, wrens, and Tree Swallows
- Starling-resistant crescent for Purple Martins (as shown above) to discourage the non-native European Starling, a major competitor of the martin.

Innovative Features: The SuperGourd is a 10", one-piece, plastic gourd with a molded-in, threaded access port, fitted with a heavy-duty screw-on cap. The access port is nearly 4" in diameter,

large enough to admit a human hand. The cap makes the access port totally watertight. Landlords merely twist the cap off to do nest checks, nest replacements, and end-of-season clean-outs. Because of the access port's high viewing angle, nest contents are easily visible during nest checks. The SuperGourd also has a large, molded-in rain canopy that doubles as a perching platform. The canopy is placed high enough above the entrance hole to allow the perfect amount of head clearance for hole-perching martins. The SuperGourd weighs about 32 ounces, slightly more than a natural gourd its size. Being a one-piece product, it has no seams to potentially leak, and it's seven 1/4" drainage holes will rapidly drain away any rain that may blow in. The SuperGourd is blow-molded in a white (sun reflecting), opaque, high-density polyethylene plastic, with ultraviolet inhibitors added for long life. These gourds are an attractive alternative for those landlords too busy to grow, paint, and modify natural gourds. They have all the advantages of a natural gourd, but cost less than a properly-prepared and equipped one, and have the added benefit of long life, low maintenance, and easy, weather-tight access.

How to Use the SuperGourd

Screwing the Threaded Cap Off and On: To remove the cap, twist it off in a counterclockwise direction. The cap requires 3/4 of a revolution to twist off. The cap will twist back on smoothly if it is

Continued on back

Continued from front

threaded on correctly. To put the cap on: twist it on in a clockwise direction. If the cap ever falls off in use, it wasn't threaded on correctly, it was cross threaded. Sometimes it is necessary to actually begin spinning the cap on by twisting it in the wrong direction first, until you find the starting position in the matching threads. The cap requires 3/4 of a revolution to snug back on.

Cleaning Up Surface Soot and Manufacturing Burrs: On occasion, during the process of punching the entrance hole, a sharp edge sometimes forms around the entrance hole. Landlords should remove these burrs using a razor blade knife, a piece of sandpaper, or a file. If a hanging hole is not cleanly punched out, a 5/16" drill bit will clear it. Use soap, water, and an abrasive pad to wash off any soot or plastic debris left in (or on) the gourd from the manufacturing process.

Adding Nesting Material (IMPORTANT): Cavity-hunting martins have an overwhelming preference for nest cavities that already contain nesting material. To make your SuperGourds extra attractive to martins, place 2-3 generous handfuls of soft, dried (brown) White Pine needles in each gourd prior to hanging. Spread this material evenly around the bottom of the gourd. Do not use sawdust or cedar shavings (pet bedding) as these both will hold water like a sponge.

Hanging SuperGourds:

SuperGourds can be hung on one of the many gourd racks Bird Abodes sells, from the bottom corners of an existing martin house, or along a cable hung between two poles. When hanging SuperGourds underneath a martin house, or along a line, use #10 or #12 gauge, plastic-coated, solid (single-strand) copper wire. Do not use copper wire that has multiple internal strands — it is not strong enough. In extremely windy areas, the #10 gauge wire is the preferred choice because it is thicker and stronger than #12. You will need about 15 inches of wire per gourd. Insert the wire through the hanging holes so an equal amount sticks out each side. Bend the wires 90-degrees upward, then wrap each end of the wire snugly around the line, eye hooks, porch railings, or gourd rack arm you are attaching it to. When properly hung, the gourds should swing (not twist) in the wind and should not be capable of bumping each other or other objects in a strong wind. The top of the gourd should be about 1" below the object it is hung from (unless it's hung from a line; then snug it up. When hanging gourds from the bottom corners or porches of a wooden house, use a set of two eye hooks screwed into the underside, spaced about 3 inches apart.

Drilling Extra Hanging Holes (optional): You can easily drill a set of front-to-back hanging holes in the SuperGourd if you

need to for a particular hanging situation. Use a 5/16" drill bit if you are going to use a hanging wire. Use a 13/32" drill bit if you are hanging it on a GMA (Gourd-Mounting Arm) that comes with many of the popular gourd racks on the market, including the ones sold by us. Hang your SuperGourds so the entrance hole points outward, away from the mounting pole. Use white, 100% silicone caulking to plug up any unused hanging holes to eliminate water entry.

Caring for SuperGourds: These gourds, caps, and porches have been molded with the maximum amount of UV (ultraviolet light) inhibitors possible and should have a very long life span. In fact, the hundreds of thousands of SuperGourds I've sold in the past 18 years still all look brand new once scrubbed up at season's end. However, all plastic products will eventually break down in the destructive rays of the sun. To maximize their life, bring your SuperGourds inside for the winter after the last young at your colony site have fledged and stopped returning at night to roost in them (i.e., late July or August). At season's end, remove the nests to your compost pile (nests will be full of crawly parasites) and wash all surfaces of the SuperGourd with a mild solution of dish soap and water. Rinse thoroughly with a garden hose. Should these gourds ever reach the end of their useful life span, they can be recycled in your community's recycling program (notice the #2 HDPE recycling logo on the bottom). Heavy-duty replacement caps are available from Bird Abodes should you lose any.

Conducting Nest Checks: Having an access door on your gourds makes managing your martins simple and easy. I suggest that you individually number your gourds with stick-on numbers, conduct weekly nest checks, and keep a written martin diary. A handful of martin landlords are reluctant to conduct nest checks on the martins under their care because they fear it is harmful and disruptive tampering. This has not been my experience, or that of other landlords. In fact, my research has shown that landlords who conduct weekly nest checks all season long fledge up to TWICE the number of martin nestlings per active nest as landlords who don't. This is because during nest checks, a vigilant landlord can take action to remedy the rare wet nest or much more common, parasite-infested nest. Landlords who have never done nest checks need to expect a certain level of reproductive failure and accept it as normal for a wild bird. On average, about 15% of martin eggs fail to hatch and about 20% of nestling martins fail to fledge.

Guarantee: If you have any problems with these gourds, or have questions, comments, or suggestions, please write or e-mail me. I aim to keep both our human and avian customers happy!



Crescent-holed SuperGourd shown with our new, optional, inner/outer porch