

Upper Deerfield Township Environmental Commission

Purple Martins

If you think you have too much company in the summer, you should talk to Roy Weakland. He has 72 guest rooms and they're all occupied all summer long!

Roy is the landlord for a colony of purple martins, who live in a handsome array of gourd-shaped nesting boxes hanging on racks that are mounted on retractable poles in his yard. He provides each breeding pair with a clean and safe place to build a nest, lay eggs and fledge the 2-8 young birds they parent each year, sometimes in two broods. The birds like it so much that they return every year, migrating from their overwintering grounds in South America.

Landlords like Roy help maintain a purple martin community here, even though the birds' natural habitat—tree cavities—was removed years ago when local forests were converted to fields. Fortunately, his hospitality does not require feeding, as Upper Deerfield has a generous supply of a martin's favorite food—flying insects—which they catch in midair. A large bird bath provides a convenient water supply. And the design of the nesting boxes helps deter invasive predators such as owls, starlings and house sparrows, who have been known to kill adult martins, destroy any eggs or young chicks and take over the nest. Locating the poles away from shrubs and trees helps deter ground-based predators like raccoons, cats and snakes.



So, is the purple martin really purple? Well, for accuracy it should probably be called “bluish-black.” The male is all black with a shiny blue sheen, while the female's body also has a bluish sheen with lighter underparts. Purple martins are quite vocal with sounds that might be described as chirp, chortle, rattle and croak. Males have a special courtship song as well as a dawn song. Since the pre-colonial era, when they helped Native Americans by eating insects that could damage their crops, martins have associated comfortably with humans, who now provide all the nesting sites in the eastern states.

Watch Out for Box Turtles



Have you seen any box turtles creeping across one of your favorite roadways? This is the time of year they're out on a mission: males are looking for mates and females for nesting sites. Here's how you can help:

- Turtles in danger of being struck by a car, but who are uninjured, should be helped across the road. Pick them up by grasping them firmly by both sides of the body, in front of their hind legs. Be careful not to drop them!

- Make sure to put down the turtle in the direction it was heading. Never turn them around! The turtle is on a

mission, and if you turn it around, it will simply creep back across the road when you drive away.

- Do not relocate them. Many turtles have a territory they call home and they will search for ways to go back, often perishing in the attempt.

During hot, dry weather, box turtles will often seek out springs and seepages where they dig deeply into the cool mud. They spend much of their time buried in the leaves and dirt of the forest floor, emerging to feed, especially after or during rainstorms. During the day, these turtles hunt for food, find mates and bask on exposed rocks and logs. Sleeping behavior among these turtles is highly individualistic and different members of the same species may choose to sleep underwater or on an exposed rock, log or sandy beach.

Source: New Jersey Box Turtle Project

Eco-Friendly Paving

If you are paving a driveway or a patio, you'll find a number of new eco-friendly products. Instead of polluting your yard, playground, veggie garden or the nearby stream with runoff from cars, trucks and the neighbor's dog, these improved products let liquids filter through to the ground beneath. In addition to the tried-and-true surface of gravel here are a few new options:

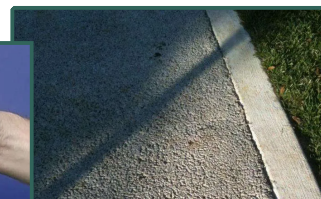


These pavers (above and below) look like bricks or natural stone, but are fully permeable.



Porous concrete (above right) looks like the concrete you're used to, but rain and snowmelt filter right through (above). Concrete can be shaded with earthy tones for a more natural appearance.

Source: Janet Hall for Gardenista



An open grid system (below) lets the greenery grow through, while offering excellent drainage and erosion protection.

