

House Beautiful

An abundance of natural materials can help your wild neighbors safely feather their nests

by RUTHANNE JOHNSON



Damp, shoddily constructed, or toxic housing isn't what most parents want for their families. But when natural building materials are scarce, wild animals must use what's available.

Urban bird nests often incorporate cellophane, rubber bands, string, wire, and other manmade materials that can entangle, impale, or suffocate nestlings. Squirrels have been known to kidnap stuffed toys and gut lawn furniture for lining their leafy, treetop dreys—unwittingly creating choking hazards for their young and exposing them to synthetic chemicals. In Boulder, Colo., bird store owner Steve Frye once discovered an oriole's bag-shaped nest woven with fishing line. Another nest he found was constructed entirely of cigarette butts and reeked like an ashtray.

Such building mistakes can be costly: Studies have shown that the young of some species have lower survival rates if they're raised in poorly constructed nests, says Tina Phillips, an extension associate with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You can help wild families thrive—and afford yourself some wildlife-watching fun in the process—by following these tips for providing safe nesting materials, whether you have many acres or a small balcony.

► MAINTAIN NATURE'S "MESS."

To build and line their nests, birds use twigs, grasses, leaves, sticks, bark, pine needles, rootlets, plant fluff, feathers, fur, and other natural materials. Rabbits, chipmunks, and other small mammals use many of the same materials. Leave these items and chemical-free grass and plant clippings scattered on the ground, in small piles or baskets, or in mesh bags hung from trees or fences. "You can get much better habitat by limiting regular yard maintenance regimens," says Phillips. "... As long as they can find it, they will use it."

► SUPPLY SOFT BEDDING.

Distribute chemical-free pet and human hair in your yard for chipping sparrows, tufted titmice, and other birds who line their nests with animal fur and hair. (Don't use fur from pets receiving flea or tick treatment.) You also can collect feathers and undyed wool from sanctuaries and wildlife rehabbers.

Lichen and moss are also excellent for bedding and home construction. Phillips pours yogurt between the crevices in her brick patio to encourage moss growth. "It's great for the birds and looks really cool." Other useful nesting items include hay; thin strips of cloth, yarn, or string 1-inch wide and no longer than 6 inches (preferably undyed or colored with natural dyes); and untreated cotton from vitamin bottles or other sources without chemical residue.

► PROVIDE NATURAL CEMENT AND CAULKING.

Hummingbirds, kinglets, and many warblers bind their nests with spider and caterpillar silk. "If you can live with the sight of a few spiderwebs outside your home, they'll use it for sure," Phillips says. Maintaining a shallow muddy spot, especially in dry areas, can help swallows, robins, and magpies, who pack mud into their nests.

► LET IT BE.

Leave shed snakeskins in the wild: Great-crowned flycatchers, blue grosbeaks, and tufted titmice weave this material into their nests, possibly to deter predators. While birdhouses and nesting boxes should be cleaned out at the end of each season to prevent the spread of parasites, don't remove old nests from the wild. Some birds return to these structures every year. Others roost there after their young have fledged, or move into the abandoned nests of other birds. Abandoned squirrel nests can serve as resting platforms for raccoons and other animals.

► **FIND MORE TIPS** and apply for The HSUS's Urban Wildlife Sanctuary Program at humanesociety.org/sanctuary.



RECIPE
BOX

Dining Out, Veg-Style

Butternut squash ravioli smothered in cashew cream sauce. Seasonal fresh greens with avocado, pine nuts, and kalamata olive vinaigrette. Candied pumpkin seeds and caramel sauce over locally grown baked apples. The message in Candle 79's menu is clear: There's never been a more delicious time to incorporate vegetarian meals into your diet.

"People are shocked ... just floored really that the food is that delicious," says Benay Vynerib, chief operating officer of the upscale, all-vegan eatery and wine bar and its sister restaurant, Candle Café.

In recent years, meatless meals have become a mainstay of restaurant offerings. A recent survey by the National Restaurant Association lists vegetarian and vegan entrees as two of the industry's "hottest trends"—not surprising in an era when people are increasingly aware of the health, environmental, and animal welfare impacts of their food selections. While fast-food chains and steak houses add veggie dishes to their menus, fine dining spots like the world-famous Candle 79 in Manhattan's Upper East Side are mincing stereotypes of plant-based cuisine.

"I'll never forget this father of the bride last year," Vynerib says. "He was adamantly convinced he wasn't going to like the food. And he's been back several times."

In this recipe from the *Candle 79 Cookbook* (available November 2011), saffron-scented vegetables and meatless sausage combine to make a crowd-pleasing version of a classic Spanish dish.

— **Julie Falconer**

Paella — Serves 6

2 ears fresh corn,
husked
1¼ teaspoons saffron
3 tablespoons olive oil
½ pound oyster mushrooms,
stemmed and chopped

Sea salt
Pepper, freshly ground
½ cup white onion, chopped
2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
2 red bell peppers, stemmed,
seeded, and chopped

½ green bell pepper, stemmed,
seeded, and chopped
1¼ teaspoons smoked paprika
1 cup cauliflower florets, chopped
1 cup tomatoes, chopped
3 to 4 cups vegetable broth

2 cups arborio or Valencia rice
1 cup meatless sausage,
cut diagonally into 1-inch pieces
½ cup green onions,
white and green parts, chopped
Lemon wedges, for garnish

- Using tongs, hold the corn over a gas flame and cook, turning, until nicely charred. When cool enough to handle, cut the kernels off the cobs and set aside.
- Soak the saffron in 1 cup of hot water. Set aside.
- Heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat, and sauté mushrooms, with salt and pepper to taste, for 5 minutes. Remove from heat, transfer to large bowl, and set aside.
- Using the same pan, heat another tablespoon of olive oil. Add onion, garlic, red and green bell peppers, and 1 teaspoon of smoked paprika and cook over medium heat until just tender, about 3 minutes. Add reserved corn, cauliflower, and tomatoes. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, for about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and add to mushrooms.
- Heat vegetable stock in a saucepan and let simmer. Heat the remaining tablespoon of olive oil over medium heat in large soup pot. Add rice and stir until well coated, about 30 seconds. Add the reserved saffron water

and cook, stirring, until it is absorbed. Add the simmering vegetable stock, a half a cup at a time, and cook, stirring, until rice has absorbed it all. Rice should be tender, not mushy, and retain its bite.

- To get the *socarrat*, or caramelized crust on the rice, uncover pan and increase the heat to high. Cook until rice crackles and smells toasty, being careful not to burn it. Add reserved vegetables and sausage and stir. Cook over medium heat, scraping bottom of pot so rice doesn't stick, for about 3 minutes.
- Remove pan from heat and cover with a kitchen towel for 10 minutes. Taste and adjust seasonings, if necessary.
- Sprinkle paella with remaining ¼ teaspoon of smoked paprika and green onions. Garnish with lemon wedges and serve.

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Tips for Eating Out

In recent years, plant-based cuisine has moved squarely into the mainstream—even taking the spotlight in episodes of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *The Martha Stewart Show*, and the Food Network’s *Cupcake Wars*. More restaurants are following the trend, making it easier than ever to find satisfying meatless meals. Still, a little creativity or forethought can facilitate your quest to eat lower on the food chain. Here are some tips for overcoming potential roadblocks.

TOP CHEF TIP-OFF

THE CHALLENGE: You’re taking your parents to their favorite restaurant, where the menu hasn’t changed since the Ford administration. You’d prefer a veg option, but you don’t want to be stuck with a bowl of iceberg lettuce and a side of fries.

THE SOLUTION: Call ahead, and see what the chef can offer for a vegan meal, suggests Benay Vynerib, chief operating officer of New York City’s Candle Café and Candle 79 restaurants. “Chefs are more than willing to accommodate, but they love the heads-up, because it gives them the opportunity to be creative and to show you that they care.” Also check with servers; many are more than willing to accommodate requests or steer you toward options not listed on the menu.

WORLD EXPLORER

THE CHALLENGE: Dining out is your favorite pastime. While you’d like to eat fewer animal products, you don’t want to be limited to Italian pastas and Mexican veggie burritos.

THE SOLUTION: Introduce your taste buds to some new flavors. Chinese, Indian, Ethiopian, Japanese, Middle Eastern, Thai, and other ethnic restaurants offer a plethora of veg dishes. And consider joining a vegetarian or vegan meetup group; oftentimes the best way to discover new dining spots is through word of mouth.

UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY

THE CHALLENGE: You’re frequently on the road, or in airport terminals, where franchise eateries and fast-food joints prevail.

THE SOLUTION: Chain restaurants like Ruby Tuesday, Johnny Rockets, and Red Robin offer mouth-watering veggie burgers with all the fixings. Even fast-food joints like Taco Bell, Quiznos, Chipotle, Subway, and Fazoli’s feature meatless items. With some advance planning (or a good GPS), a road trip can also be a chance to visit restaurants you won’t find at home. Vegetarian eateries are becoming increasingly popular, and they’re not limited to hole-in-the-wall juice bars and sandwich shops. Add some to your itinerary, and getting to your destination could be the highlight of your trip.

