

This column features questions from readers submitted via the website. To submit a question to Small Acre Sam, visit [BarnyardsandBackyards.com](http://BarnyardsandBackyards.com). If your question is featured, you will receive a free one-year subscription to *Barnyards & Backyards!*



# ask Sam

## question

**Dear Sam,**

I have birdhouses on my property. Do I need to clean them in the fall? – *Janice, Powell*

**Dear Janice,**

Yes. Just as a landlord inspects and cleans an apartment after a tenant moves out, we need to inspect and clean birdhouses to find problems and prevent new problems next spring. Nest boxes may also need to be cleaned between multiple nesting events in one summer.

There are several reasons to clean a box between broods in one season. Good sanitation prevents parasites from infecting a new brood. Adult birds may build

a new nest on top of an old one in the box, and the new nest would be higher in the box and closer to potential predators at the hole.

Clean boxes thoroughly at the end of the nesting season in fall. Approach a nesting box cautiously because there could be insects, mice, or snakes inside. Wear rubber gloves and a mask when cleaning to avoid contact with dust, mites, and dried feces. Remove nesting materials and put them in a bag immediately to contain blowfly larvae or mites. A scraping tool helps remove dried-on material. Scrub the box with soap and water if you can. Disinfect the box with a birdhouse and feeder cleaner or a 10 percent bleach solution applied with a spray bottle. Allow the box to air out for a day if you use bleach solution. You can leave the box outside for the winter or bring it into a storage area. If the box is left outside, you will need to clean it again in late winter to prepare for early spring arrivals.

– **Sam**

Resources:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology at [www.birdscornell.edu](http://www.birdscornell.edu)

*Birdhouse Book*, Audubon Society, Margaret A. Barker and E. Wolfson, Voyageur Press, 2013.

*Clean nestboxes in October* (a video) at <http://birdnote.org>

*Cleaning out nestboxes* at <http://www.sialis.org/clean.htm>

answer

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