



Purple Martin Housing Requirements

A Basic Guide

by: Purple Martin Products

First of all, there are many different manufactures of Purple Martin Housing. I am a bit partial to the items that are sold on this web store. In my personal opinion these are some of the best products in the market today. When we designed them, it was the purple martin who it we designed for with the added human benefits built in. From the quality of the materials used, to the overall design, everything we offer for sale, with care, will last a lifetime. The Purple Martin Hobby is not a cheap one. When you invest in quality housing you need only do it one time. The benefits you get back from the martins includes a pest free yard (flying insects), the aerial show and the beautiful warble the martins grace us which gives us landlords hours of pleasure.

Location: The single most important thing you will do is pick your housing location. Purple Martins need flyways, just like an airport has runways. Housing should be placed in the most open area of your yard, but also if possible close to your human home. Trees should be no closer than 40' to your housing (predators can hide in the trees). Do you have a water source, like a pond on your property? If you do, and there are no trees around the pond, that is another ideal spot for martins. While most landlords place housing in their back yards, we have customers who have them in their front yards, mounted to their docks, or out in pasture fields.

Vertical vs. Horizontal: All of our gourd racks and T-14's are vertically raised housing. All of our housing is raised by either the use of the rope and pulley system or a winch. Why is this so important? So we can monitor the martins and make sure they are doing well. Whether you need to do it daily because you are setting a gourd trap to catch that pesky house sparrow, or its time for your every 5-day nest check. The ease of how your housing works will make your task seem that much easier. There are other manufactured poles available, like a telescoping pole, but they are hard to use, and in many cases end up no longer working. Save yourself some pinched fingers and stay away from them. One other economical way of hanging gourds is via a "gourd line". Here a landlord has two large poles on opposite sides with a horizontal wire line strung between the two poles. While these are not the most landlord friendly, and you need to use a ladder to do nest checks, they do work.

Height of Poles: My experience has shown gourds can be hung as low as eight-feet. Our gourd racks come in two configurations. A two-inch square by 14-foot tall pole and a three-inch square by 16-foot tall pole. You can add a two-foot extension piece to the 14-foot pole, thereby making it 16-feet overall. Unless you are custom building a pole 16-feet is more than enough height.

Material: Our gourd racks are made using high-strength aluminum for the poles, that are designed to withstand high winds. The other components of gourd racks are made from either aluminum or stainless steel. Hardware used in the assembly is stainless steel. Even the cable included with our gourd racks are made using stainless steel. There is very little that can rust on our gourd racks. Troyer and SuperGourds are made using UV-inhibited polyethylene. I have SuperGourds that are 20 years-old and are just as nice as the day I purchased them. You can't say that about other plastic gourds out on the market.

Interior of Housing: Did you know that when aluminum housing was first developed it was thought that a 6" x 6" apartment was large enough! Today we have thrown that away. In order for our nestling to grow they need a larger apartment where they can spread their wings. Deep compartments are also favored by the martin. So whether you are looking at any of our Troyer gourds, the SuperGourd or a T-14 house, know that the martins are raising their young in an apartment large enough to accommodate them.

Entrances: When I first started hosting martins my only choice was a natural gourd with a round hole. It was ridiculously hard to do proper nest checks. In the last 25 years of hosting martins, many martin related inventions came and went but the single most important was the advent of the starling-resistant entrance hole. The first successful entrance was the Crescent. Then there was the Conley I, also known more popularly as the Excluder, followed by the Conley II. I have tried them all and I have found the martins prefer the Conley II. These entrances can be found on the Troyer Vertical as well as the Troyer Horizontal gourd and T-14 housing. 99% of the time they will stop starlings from breaching the gourd (unfortunately, southern landlords seem to have a slightly smaller starlings in the spring). The only entrance I know that can nearly stop the starling is the Excluder, but it is also restrictive and some martins have given up on using them. All the starling-resistant entrance should have a porch, including the crescent gourd. The martin will squat down to enter and the porch makes it easy for them to do that. No entrance will stop the House Sparrow, however a quality gourd will have a dedicated trap you can use. Round-holed gourds should be no larger than 2-1/8" in diameter. Round-holed gourds should be used in colonies that can be monitored and kept free of the starling and sparrows.

Access to your Housing: Andrew Troyer was the first landlord to invent access to gourds. We used large plastic jar lids and cut a hole into our natural gourd, and then caulked, bolt, or by whatever means necessary, mounted these access caps to our gourds. When James R. Hill developed the SuperGourd, he was the first manufacturer to include an access port on the side of the gourd. A few years later when Andrew Troyer developed his Troyer Horizontal gourd, it was the second manufactured gourd with an access cap. Today it's a must for landlords. I prefer the threaded screw-on caps (lids) best. Also recently, the gourd manufactures even developed their own heavy-duty caps. These are a huge improvement over the older ones which needed liners to keep the light out.

Musts for Housing: Gourds should have uv-inhibitors in their plastic, thick to keep them cool in the summer, and have drainage holes on the undersides of the gourds for any rain water that may blow in. Landlords, especially the southern landlords, should consider adding ventilation elbows to your gourds. A large family of growing baby martins can let off a lot of heat and condensation can become a problem. Having access to the gourd to do nest changes (when your young is 5-10 days old and 15-20 days old) is a must.

Predator Guards: Climbing predators like snakes and raccoons are a huge problem for many landlords. Please do not turn a blind eye to this potential problem. The easiest way to protect your housing is with a pole guard. The pole guard, to be the most effective, should be placed as high on the pole as humanly possible. If you know you live in area with high populations of snakes I would highly suggest you research snake guards made using netting. Be prepared, there may come a day when you will need to cut a live snake out from the netting.

In conclusion: Everything here sold on Purple Martin Products exceeds industry standards. We may also suggest that you learn more about the Purple Martin. We have several excellent books, but the best is Andrew Troyer's *A Purple Martin Journey*. It is almost a must if you are new to the martin hobby, as it will help you deal with everything from nest checks, predators and supplemental feeding only to name a few. The Purple Martin needs us as they rely 100% on humans for their housing. Share your hobby with your children, grandchildren and neighbors. The more we can help the martins the greater chance they will be here for future generations of martin landlords.

Reference Materials used: *A Purple Martin Journey* by Andrew Troyer