Birdhouses

Goals
Introducing students to bird habitats in the garden.

Objectives
Students will be able to construct a birdhouse from gourds grown in the garden.

Materials
- Mature gourds
- Wire
- Knife or handsaw
- Drill and assorted bits
- Acrylic paints and brushes
- Water sealant and foam brushes (aerosol can)

Time: 30-40 minutes

Background Information
When the stalks turn from green to yellow or brown, gourds are ready for picking. Use clippers to cut them from the vine, leaving some of the vine attached. Clean them both with a damp cloth. Spread gourds on screens or newspaper in a dry, well-ventilated area. Turn them every few days to prevent rotting. It is impossible to predict how long it will take each gourd to dry, but small gourds dry faster than large gourds. Look for your gourds to change to soft ivories and browns, sometimes mottled grey. This is a natural part of the drying process and makes each gourd unique. Check the gourds to make sure that they are still firm to the touch. Discard any that feel soft. Your gourds are dry when they feel lightweight. Some dried gourds rattle when shaken.

Introduction (5 min)
Hold up a picture of a bird or write the word "BIRD" on a large sheet of paper/poster board. Have the students turn to a partner and talk about types of birds with which they are familiar. Have the groups share their responses and if you are using paper, record student responses around the word "BIRD." Then have students turn to a different partner and discuss the behaviors of birds—what they eat, where they live, how they build their homes, how they migrate, etc (students may need some prompting with this part). Like before, have students share their knowledge and record their ideas if possible. Display the poster in a common area for students to see their responses.

Activity Steps (20 – 30 min)
1. Explain that some bird species live in Colorado all year and need a warm home for the winter. Gardens are a perfect bird habitat because there are so many insects, seeds and fruit to eat. The students are going to help give the birds a home by building houses out of gourds.

2. Before making a gourd birdhouse, decide which species of birds you would like to attract by consulting the following table for the gourd size and the entry hole dimension for that particular species.

GOURD BIRDHOUSES				
Bird	Gourd (width)	Hole Size	Entry Hole Height	Special Instructions
Bluebird	5"	1 3/8"	8"	Mount at edge of a clearing
Chickadee	4"	1 1/8"	7"	Layer floor with wood shavings
Nuthatch	4"	1 3/8"	7"	Layer floor with wood shavings
Titmouse	4"	1 1/4"	7"	Layer floor with wood shavings
Swallow	5"	1 1/2"	5"	Mount at edge of a clearing

3. Let the students choose a gourd and help them cut entrances for the birdhouse. Scoop out the insides. Fill with water and a handful of gravel and shake to loosen any remaining pulp. Discard contents.
4. Drill two small holes at the top of each gourd. Insert a wire through the holes and twist it into a loop to form a hanger. Then drill four ¼ inch drain holes in the bottom.
5. Finish the birdhouse by painting the gourds with acrylic paints and a water sealant. Mount the houses in a sheltered area at least five feet above the ground.
6. Watch who visits the birdhouses over the seasons and keep track of resident bird species in your garden journal.

Conclusion (5 min)

Gallery walk: Hang or display the gourd birdhouses around the garden. Allow students to walk around and admire the birdhouses and discuss their favorites or things that they like about each one.

Notes

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