

Hold the Ice, Please

Even in the winter, backyard birds need water. You can supply it with this easy-to-make heated water hole.

“NORTH DAKOTA winters are long and cold,” says Erlys Haerter, of Williston. “I thought if we could provide some water for the birds, it would make their life a bit easier.

“So my father came up with a great idea for a heated water hole,” Erlys continues. “He gave the directions to my husband, Paul, who built it.”

We gave this project a try in our own workshop and placed it out on a deck in the dead of winter. It worked surprisingly well, and took a very low-wattage standard light bulb to keep the water from freezing.

We recommend using the lowest wattage bulb possible that keeps the water ice-free. The birds will be happy, and so will you since it will have little impact on your electric bill.



Here's What You'll Need...

- ❑ One 2-foot x 4-foot plywood board, 1/2 inch thick
- ❑ One piece of 5-foot 1-inch x 14-1/2-inch foam insulation
- ❑ Round metal cake pan, 8-1/2-inch diameter
- ❑ Waterproof outdoor spotlight fixture
- ❑ One 15- to 40-watt standard light bulb
- ❑ 1-1/4-inch finishing nails
- ❑ 5/8-inch sheet-metal screws
- ❑ Waterproof construction adhesive
- ❑ Waterproof carpenter's glue
- ❑ Four chair skids
- ❑ Properly installed GFI outlet

Recommended Tools...

- ❑ Table saw
- ❑ Compass
- ❑ Saber saw
- ❑ Rat-tail file
- ❑ Utility knife

Time to Start Building

1. Cut the side, top and bottom pieces from plywood using the board layout at top right. On one of the side pieces, cut a small notch in the center along the bottom

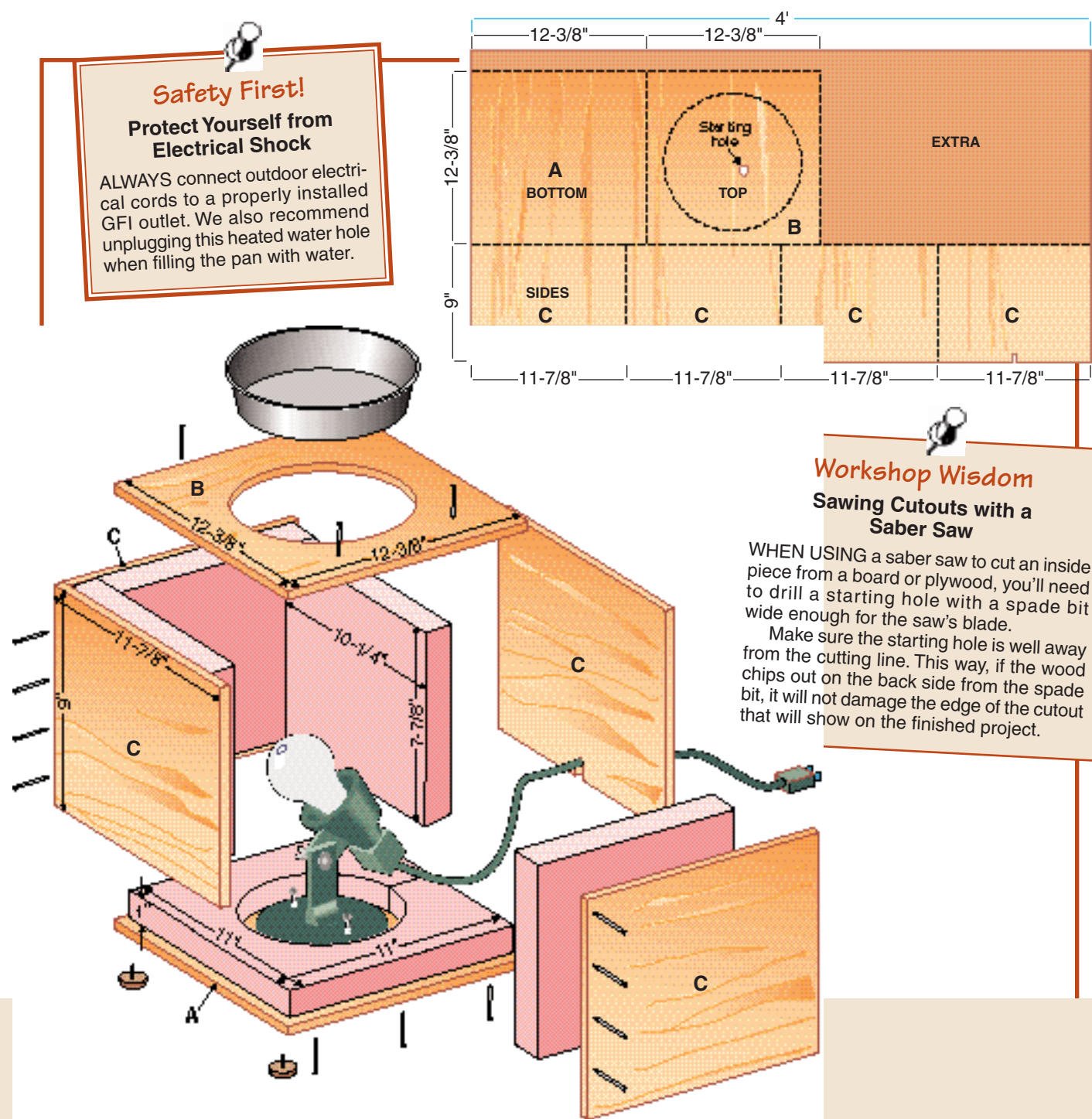
edge. This will be for the outdoor light fixture's cord.

2. Determine the size hole to make in the top piece of the plywood for the cake pan. (We recommend practicing this step with a piece of cardboard or scrap board before cutting the actual hole.)

To quickly find the center of the top piece, draw diagonal lines from corner to corner. Draw a circle with a compass the diameter of the cake pan just below the rim.

3. Cut the hole for the pan with a saber saw, cutting right along the guideline. (To start this hole, see “Workshop Wisdom” at far right for a handy tip.) This will allow the pan to sit down into the hole. Make adjustments if necessary. The pan is sitting properly when the top lip rests on top of the board, and the rest is below the surface.

4. Overlap the sides of the box to form a square. Drill pilot holes and fasten the sections together with 1-1/4-inch finishing nails. Use waterproof carpenter's glue between the joints.



Safety First! Protect Yourself from Electrical Shock

ALWAYS connect outdoor electrical cords to a properly installed GFI outlet. We also recommend unplugging this heated water hole when filling the pan with water.

Workshop Wisdom Sawing Cutouts with a Saber Saw

WHEN USING a saber saw to cut an inside piece from a board or plywood, you'll need to drill a starting hole with a spade bit wide enough for the saw's blade.

Make sure the starting hole is well away from the cutting line. This way, if the wood chips out on the back side from the spade bit, it will not damage the edge of the cutout that will show on the finished project.

5. Center and mount the light fixture to the bottom with 5/8-inch sheet-metal screws. Align the fixture so that the cord is centered on one side, as pictured in the plan above.

6. Tuck the cord into the notch before gluing and nailing the bottom board to the sides (drill pilot holes first).

7. Cut a piece of insulation 11-inches square with a utility knife (be careful when cutting) to fit in the bottom of the box. Cut a hole in the center of it to fit over the mounted light fixture. Also slice one side of the insulation so that it can be placed over the cord. Glue the insulation to the bottom of the box using waterproof construction adhesive.

8. For the sides, cut the insulation 10-1/4 inches x 7-

7/8 inches. Glue insulation to the sides of the box.

9. Glue, then nail the top to the sides with 1-1/4-inch finishing nails. Turn the box over and attach one chair skid to each bottom corner.

10. Screw a standard light bulb ranging from 15 to 40 watts into the outdoor fixture. Choose the lowest wattage that will keep the water from freezing. In our test, a 25-watt bulb kept the water from freezing, down to about 18° Fahrenheit.

11. With the fixture unplugged, set the pan in the hole and fill it with fresh water. Then plug it into a properly installed GFI outlet (see “Safety First!” at the top of the page) and watch the birds enjoy this unexpected winter watering hole.