

All About Your Bat House

Bat houses are available from many sources, or you could build your own. If you build one, get plans or instructions from a reliable source, such as the Organization for Bat Conservation (www.batconservation.org). A properly designed house with features bats like will have a higher success rate.

Bat houses can have occupancy rates ranging from below 20% to over 80%, depending on the population of bats already in the area. Don't be discouraged if bats don't roost in your bat house right away—have patience and give them two full summers before relocating or modifying the house.

To hang your bat house, you could purchase brackets to bolt it to a high wall of your house or barn, or drill through the back of the house and mount it onto strong nails. It is heavy, so be sure to provide adequate support.

Size matters

It is better to have a larger bat house than a smaller one because in a larger one the heat is more even and it acts as a heat sink. It will also be a lot easier to attract more bats. Houses with several internal baffles will hold more bats and they will help keep each other warm.

Location, Location, Location

Location is extremely important. Bat houses are most successful when you place them on chimneys, poles, mounted on a building or on anything 15 feet or higher. It should face south or south-east, and receive 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight. In the cooler climates it needs to be darkly coloured, to absorb sunlight and warm the house. If you put a bat house on a pole it needs to have a backboard like a basketball net. To ensure a foothold on the backboard, we suggest using plastic mesh or nylon window screening, stapled to the backboard. It is not good to put one on a tree; they have been shown to be unsuccessful.

The best way to attract bats is to place the bat house where bats are known to exist. Bat houses that are placed near water can attract a lot of bats. They need space and protection from predators and obstacles to provide adequate flight.

Occupancy

You should wait at least 2 full summers before you move or make any alterations to the bat house. Bats are extremely vocal during the day and you will be able to hear them. You can also tell if there are bats by bat droppings. Their droppings make excellent fertilizer.

By far the most common species of bat to be reported in this part of Canada is the little brown bat. You won't likely find any other kind.

Health Concerns

Bats that are found on the ground are usually sick or injured and may bite in self-defense if they are handled. Children should be taught to never touch a wild animal. Pets should be vaccinated against rabies. Bat droppings cause no greater health threat than any other mammal's feces—if you have to clean out an attic or other space with lots of droppings, wear a dust mask and gloves, but for the small amount under a bat house, don't fret. In fact, if you place your potted plants under the bat house you will get instant fertilizer and end up with beautiful plants.

Other Wildlife

Bat houses that are mounted on buildings are the safest places from predators. If your bat house is on a pole, you should wrap predator guards or tin around the pole that the bat house is mounted on. This will stop predators from climbing. A pointed or slanted roof on the bat house will keep predators from waiting for bats on the top of the bat house.

A bat house will not interfere with a bird house, as birds and bats do not compete for food or space.

Facts About Bats



- A single Little Brown Bat can catch up to 600 mosquitoes in just one hour.
- Bats could help us kick the pesticide habit.
- Bats are not blind at all. They see quite well in the dark.
- Bats are more closely related to us than they are to rats.
- The largest bat has a wing span of almost 6 feet.
- Insect eating bats use echolocation to find and catch food.
- Bats in cooler climates hibernate or migrate during the winter.
- Tropical bats are important in rain forest ecosystems, because they pollinate flowers and disperse seeds for countless trees and shrubs.

Habitat

- Bats need a warm place to raise their pups. Attics and haylofts make ideal nurseries from the bat's point of view. However, some people are not willing to share their homes with bats, and the colony may be disturbed before the pups can fly.
- Bats are common over ponds and lakes. They catch insects and drink as they fly over the surface.
- In winter, bats hibernate in caves and mines where the temperature stays a little bit above freezing.
- Bat houses provide summer roost areas. Bats will not hibernate in these houses.

Clean North's bat houses are made as much as possible from reclaimed wood, and are painted a dark colour (brown or black or green). If you miss the Clean North bat house project, however, you can obtain a bat house from many sources, or build your own from the kits and plans available in the library or online.

Bats, Bat Houses, And Your Back Yard



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