

GUIDE TO GARDENING FOR BATS



Welcome bats in your very own backyard! With natural habitats in decline, you can help bats by providing food, water, and shelter in even the smallest of spaces. In return, bats will eat many of your garden's pests (as well as other pesky insects).



Photo: J. Scott Altenbach

Bat Gardening Basics

Provide Food

Bats eat night-flying insects, so you'll want to plant flowers that either stay open through the night or bloom through the evening. Use native plants that match your region and site conditions, as they have evolved to attract native insects. Remember: native plants attract native insects that in turn provide bat food! Other things to consider:



Photo: Michael Durham / Minden Pictures



- + Moth host plants**
Bats love to eat moths, so planting host plants will ensure you have lots of these preferred bugs at your backyard bat buffet.
- + Trees**
Trees are beneficial in so many ways. They don't close their flowers at night and they are host plants to many kinds of native insects. Oak trees especially are a boon to adding diversity and richness to any habitat. Added plus, trees create roosting options for our solitary tree bats too!
- + Light-colored flowers**
Moths and other nighttime pollinators are more attracted to flowers that are either white or very light in color.
- + The "stinkier" the better**
Insects are also attracted to fragrant flowers and plants.

Keep it Organic

Remember you are trying to attract insects to your bat garden. Be sure to avoid using harmful chemicals such as herbicides and pesticides. These will negatively impact your natural insect populations and potentially harm bats as well. Organic gardening is the best choice for bats (and many other species of wildlife).

Dead Trees Please

They may seem unsightly to us, but dead trees are a gold mine for bats. Not only do they provide roosting habitat for certain species, but they also support a diverse insect population. If you can leave dead trees up safely, we highly recommend this practice. If you do need to fell a dead tree, you can always leave the wood on the ground to rot. It will still attract lots of different insects.

Keep Fluffy Inside

Outdoor cats are no friend to wildlife. They are estimated to consume approximately one billion wild birds annually in the United States alone (Loss et al. 2013). Unsurprisingly they will happily include bats on their list of edible outdoor critters. If you are unable to keep your cat indoors all the time, we recommend at least bringing them in at night. It's better for the bats (and your cats too).

Turn Off Your Lights

Although lights can attract insects, in large urban areas light pollution is a serious issue. Excess artificial lighting impacts bat behaviors, including where and how they hunt. Keep your yard as dark as possible to let the bats do their thing and catch those insects!

Provide Water (if you can)

Providing water to bats is very important, but it's not as simple as putting out a bird bath. Since bats drink on the wing (meaning they swoop down and drink while flying) they need at least 7-10 feet in length of water to drink successfully. If you have a pond or water trough these can work well. Just make sure you put in an exit ramp or two in case bats (or other wildlife) fall in! Make sure the bats have a clear path to the water by clearing away vegetation and other clutter surrounding the water source.

Bat Houses

Installing a bat house is another great way to welcome bats to your yard. We do want to emphasize that this is something you can do in addition to a bat garden instead of something you do instead. Bat houses are great for certain species of bats, but they are a bit complicated and frustrating to get right. Bat gardens are a great way to get started helping bats, and they also provide habitat for other wildlife!



Purple Coneflower:
Echinacea purpurea,
a wonderful bat
garden plant