

A guide for bat-friendly gardening and living



Many of us have spent long summer evenings sitting in our gardens, watching as the swifts and swallows in the twilight sky are gradually replaced by bats. These small and fascinating creatures often live in close proximity to humans, using gardens as an important source of food, water and shelter.

Here we offer advice on creating a haven for bats in your garden, along with some helpful tips on how to identify these nocturnal visitors.

### Gardening for bats

Gardens can be wonderful places for people and wildlife, particularly bats. A garden that is good for insects is good for bats, as all species of British bat eat only insects such as midges, moths, mosquitoes and beetles. Whether you have a tiny city garden or acres in the countryside, you can do your bit to help bats.

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ies are the main food for most British bats.

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visited by moths, only their long tongues carl reach deep downito the hidden reptar. Short, tongued insects belove many families graftice and some moths they can only reach negation



# Which plants should I choose?

Bat-friendly gardeners should aim to plant a mixture of flowering plants, vegetables, trees and shrubs to encourage a diversity of insects, which in turn may attract different bat species. Flowers that bloom throughout the year, including both annuals and herbaceous perennials, are a good idea: night-flowering blossoms attract night-flying insects. Trees and shrubs provide food for insects and roosting opportunities for bats.

Approximate flowering periods are listed below, although they may vary according to area and weather conditions!

#### Flowers for borders

\*Aubretia (spring to early summer) \*Candytuft (summer to autumn) \*Cherry pie (summer to autumn) Corncockle Cornflower Corn marigold Corn poppy \*Echinacea English Bluebell (spring) \*Evening primrose (summer to autumn) Ox-eye daisy (summer) \*Phacelia (summer to autumn) \*Poached egg plant (summer) Primrose (spring) Red campion (spring) \*Red valerian (summer to autumn) Scabious (summer) St John's wort (spring) \*Sweet William (summer) \*Tobacco plant O Pesticide-free gardens tend to be better for wildlife and bats.

### Bat boxes

Bat boxes are artificial roosts, usually made of wood or woodcrete (a mixture of wood chips and concrete). They are designed to encourage bats into areas where there are few natural roosting sites, such as woodpecker holes in trees. Bat boxes have a useful place in bat conservation, but it should be remembered that bats take to boxes less readily than birds.

Various designs of bat box are available commercially. Wooden boxes are usually cubic or wedgeshaped, with a grooved 'bat ladder' and a narrow entrance slit at the bottom. They can be nailed to trees or walls. Woodcrete boxes are of two basic types: either cylindrical with an access hole in the front and designed to be hung on tree branches with a wire loop; or brick-shaped, usually with narrow roosting crevices inside and an entry slit at the bottom, designed to be fixed to flat surfaces such as walls of buildings. Because species have different requirements, you are more likely to attract bats to your boxes if you put up a few of each type. Designs and instructions for making your own bat box can be found at www.bats.org.uk.

Bats do not like draughts, and prefer wellinsulated boxes where temperature and humidity remain constant. Well-sealed joints are therefore important, as is the avoidance of large, loose-fitting front panels. Removable lids should be avoided, again to reduce draughts, but also to prevent disturbance or unintentional injury to bats when the box is opened. A special licence is required to disturb or handle bats in the UK, and any disturbance without a licence is illegal. For more information on bats and the law call the Bat Helpline (0845 1300 228).

All timber used in bat boxes should be roughsawn to allow bats to cling and climb, and must also be untreated, since bats are very sensitive to some chemicals used for timber treatment. A 'bat ladder' or other landing area is essential, as is an entry slit wide enough to admit bats but narrow enough to keep out predators.

Boxes are most likely to be used if they are located in places where bats are known to feed. Woodland, parkland and river banks are good places, as are gardens close to ponds, rivers or parks. If possible, they should be close to a hedge or tree line, as some species of bat use these to navigate and are reluctant to cross open spaces to get to and from roosts. The bats' approach to the box should be clear of obstacles, such as tree branches; boxes should be placed as high as possible (at least 4 or 5 metres above ground level), not only to maximise their exposure to sunlight for warmth but also to ensure security from cats or human vandals.

Ideally, between two and four boxes should be clustered, facing in different directions in order to allow bats to select a range of roosting temperatures at different times of year e.g. north, south-east and south-west. Depending on the specific location you may wish to adjust the aspect of individual boxes to maximise exposure to sunlight or to avoid prevailing wind, rain, or excessive heat.

Bats need time to find and explore new homes, and it may be several years before boxes have residents – be patient! Droppings on the landing area, urine stains around the lower parts of the box and chittering noises from inside on warm afternoons and evenings are signs of occupation. Remember not to disturb bats by opening the box or approaching too closely when they are present, although a dusk watch of their emergence is offended succession.

## Watching for bats

Here's a guide to the species of bat that you're most likely to see in and around your garden, particularly as it begins to get dark.



Pipistrelles emerge around sunset, and these are the bats that you are most likely to spot. They have an erratic flight - twisting and turning around buildings, streetlights, trees and hedges. There are three species of pipistrelle that look very similar: the common pipistrelle, the soprano pipistrelle and the rarer Nathusius' pipistrelle.

Another of our bats is the brown long-eared bat. Long-eared bats come out after dark, and usually fly very close to trees, making them difficult to spot. Their flight is slow and hovering, a little bit like that of a big butterfly.



The noctule is one of our biggest bats; noctules emerge early in the evening, just as it starts to get dark. They can sometimes be seen flying in a straight line, high overhead. About the size of a starling, their narrow wings are quite distinctive.



If you see a bat flying very low over water, skimming the surface like a mini hovercraft, it's a Daubenton's bat. Watch Daubenton's bats carefully and you may see them touch the water's surface to seize an insect with their big hairy feet.

The best way to experience the usually secret nocturnal world of bats is by using a bat detector. These amazing devices enable you to listen in to bat calls, usually too high-pitched for humans to hear - with a bit of practice it's very satisfying to be able to distinguish between bat species! Your local bat group will probably hold bat walks and talks throughout the summer months to provide an introduction to these fascinating creatures and how to spot them.

If you regularly see bats in your garden, it's possible that bats are roosting in your home, or perhaps in one of your neighbours' houses. Call the Bat Helpline (0845 1300 228) to ask for a copy of the 'Living with bats' booklet, which gives advice on what to do if you share your house with bats. The Bat Helpline will also be able to provide details of your nearest bat group, and also more information on taking part in our summer bat surveys - if you enjoy watching and listening for bats, why not sign up for our National Bat Monitoring Programme and help us to count the UK's bats?

### The future for bats

The Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) is working towards a world where bats and people thrive together in harmony, to ensure bats are around for future generations to enjoy.

We depend on the public not only for money to help conserve bats and their habitats, but also to

