

How to: Improve your garden for bats



Pipistrelles Photo: Evgeniy Yakhontov via Wikimedia Commons Photo: Hugh Clark Bat Conservation Trust



All British and Irish bats eat insects – moths, flies, beetles. Flight is very energy expensive, so they need huge prey numbers to survive. Many natural areas have been lost to development and intensive farming. This makes gardens, allotments, parks and other public open spaces important as habitats and foraging areas for bats.

Improving these areas for bats means improving them for flying insects. Additional help for bats will include roosting areas such as mature trees, spaces in roof eaves, and putting up a bat box.

Noctule Photo: Mnolf, via Wikimedia Commons

Target species: Bats most likely to be seen in gardens include common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus* and noctule *Nyctalus noctula*.

How easy is it to do?

Easy/moderate - A garden that attracts a good variety of insects will attract bats. Additional help can be given by providing a bat box which can be bought or made at home. For further information on bat boxes see the Bat Conservation Trust [guide](#).

How to do it

Increase the numbers and diversity of insects – beetles, flies and moths - by providing a variety of plants. By attracting a range of insects, you will be improving your garden for insect predators such as bats, other small mammals and birds.

- Plant and look after a variety of flowers, both day and night-scented, and with a range of different flower shapes, to attract a diversity of insects. [Wild flowers](#) such as primrose, oxeye daisy and common

knapweed; garden flowers such as fennel, lavender and tobacco plants. There is a list of suitable plants [here](#) arranged by season.

- Grow plants to flower and attract insects from [early in the year](#), such as crocus and pulmonaria, as bats are hungry, searching for food as they come out of hibernation - to [late summer](#), to attract insects for bats to forage to fatten up before hibernating.
- Include [trees and shrubs](#) such as crab apple, rowan, hawthorn and buddleia, and climbers such as honeysuckle, clematis and ivy
- Plant a boundary hedge to replace wooden fence panels and to connect your garden with other gardens, creating a hedgerow corridor for bats to forage along.
- Put in a [pond](#) with aquatic and marginal plants such as waterlily, marsh marigold and purple loosestrife. Ponds nurture and attract a lot of insects, so they are popular hunting places for bats
- Leave an area of [long grass](#) – another great habitat to attract breeding insects
- Create a compost heap
- Make [log piles](#) and [insect hotels](#)
- Put up a [bat box](#)

How much will it cost

Bat boxes cost from £13 up to over £60 depending on single or multiple cavity designs – or you can make one yourself. See the other “How to” guides for costs of other features.

How effective is it for the target species?

If you have insects flying at night you will get bats, but how many species and individuals will depend on the surrounding habitats – gardens, parks, open countryside - as well as roosting opportunities for bats.

Golden rules – what the science tells us

- To help bats you need to make sure they have a good supply of insects from moths to gnats, so try to get in as many of the habitat and plant types mentioned above
- Bats shelter and breed in hollow or split trees, in old outbuildings and in lofts. If you have evidence of them using these spaces, take care not to disturb them – they are highly protected in law.
- Bats, like most wildlife are in decline, so the more help you can give the better.

What to look for?

Sit out during fine summer evenings after sunset and watch for bats feeding over your garden and pond. A pond is particularly good as insects gather around water. Or buy a bat detector and listen! Watch around potential roost sites, for example under the eaves of houses, or hanging tiles to see if bats emerge just after sunset.

Things to be aware of

- Bats hibernate during winter but occasionally emerge to feed when the weather is mild.
- All bats and their roost sites are [strictly protected in UK law](#) and this includes intentionally disturbing them.
- It is necessary to obtain a license if you wish to handle, study or survey for bats.
- Avoid pesticides. All forms of herbicides and insecticides have a negative effect on the environment and wildlife. Poisoned insects can poison bats.
- Keep pet cats indoors during the evening – from an hour before sunset
- Reduce light pollution/garden lighting. While street lights can attract moths, bats, being nocturnal, can be negatively affected by too much artificial light
- Join your local bat group and learn more about bats in your area.
- If you find a grounded bat, pick it up using gloves or soft cloth and put it gently into a box and contact the Bat Helpline: 0345 1300 228 for further advice.

Further information

Our website

Our [page on bats](http://www.wlgf.org/mammals_bats.html) www.wlgf.org/mammals_bats.html

[Trees and shrubs](http://www.wlgf.org/woody_plants.html) for wildlife www.wlgf.org/woody_plants.html

Top recommended [wildflowers](http://www.wlgf.org/top_wildflowers.html) www.wlgf.org/top_wildflowers.html

How to: Choose pollinator plants for [winter and early spring](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_plants_winter.pdf) www.wlgf.org/ht_plants_winter.pdf

How to: Choose pollinator plants for late [summer and autumn](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_plants_summer.pdf) www.wlgf.org/ht_plants_summer.pdf

How to: Create [habitat piles](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_habitat_piles.pdf) www.wlgf.org/ht_habitat_piles.pdf

How to: Create and maintain [bee hotels](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_bee_hotel.pdf) www.wlgf.org/ht_bee_hotel.pdf

How to: Create and maintain [ponds for wildlife](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_ponds.pdf) www.wlgf.org/ht_ponds.pdf

How to: Create a [wildlife-friendly lawn](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_improve_lawn.pdf) www.wlgf.org/ht_improve_lawn.pdf

Bat Conservation Trust

Lots of [information](http://www.bats.org.uk/) at www.bats.org.uk/ where you can also find your nearest local bat group

National Bat Helpline: 0345 1300 228 email: enquiries@bats.org.uk

Bats and [the law](http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/bats_and_the_law.html) http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/bats_and_the_law.html

Making [bat boxes](http://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/buildings-planning-and-development/bat-boxes/wooden-bat-boxes) www.bats.org.uk/our-work/buildings-planning-and-development/bat-boxes/wooden-bat-boxes

Freshwater Conservation Trust

Creating [ponds for bats](http://www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Bat-dossier.pdf) www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Bat-dossier.pdf

RHS

[Bats in your garden](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=759) www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=759

List of [plants which attract insects](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/pdfs/plants-for-bats) for bats www.rhs.org.uk/advice/pdfs/plants-for-bats