



WELCOME
bats
TO YOUR
GARDEN



www.bats-ni.org.uk



The Northern Ireland Bat Group

The Northern Ireland Bat Group was formed in 1985, the year when bats first achieved protected status in Northern Ireland.

The Group's members are volunteers from all walks of life with a common interest in bats and their conservation.

The Group carries out a number of activities including:

- Providing free advice on bats for councils, businesses and individuals;
- Recording and collating bat records which are passed to CEDaR;
- Delivering bat talks and events for schools, community groups and general public;
- Cooperating in bat research projects; and
- Rescue and rehabilitation of bats.

Photo courtesy of
Austin Hopkirk

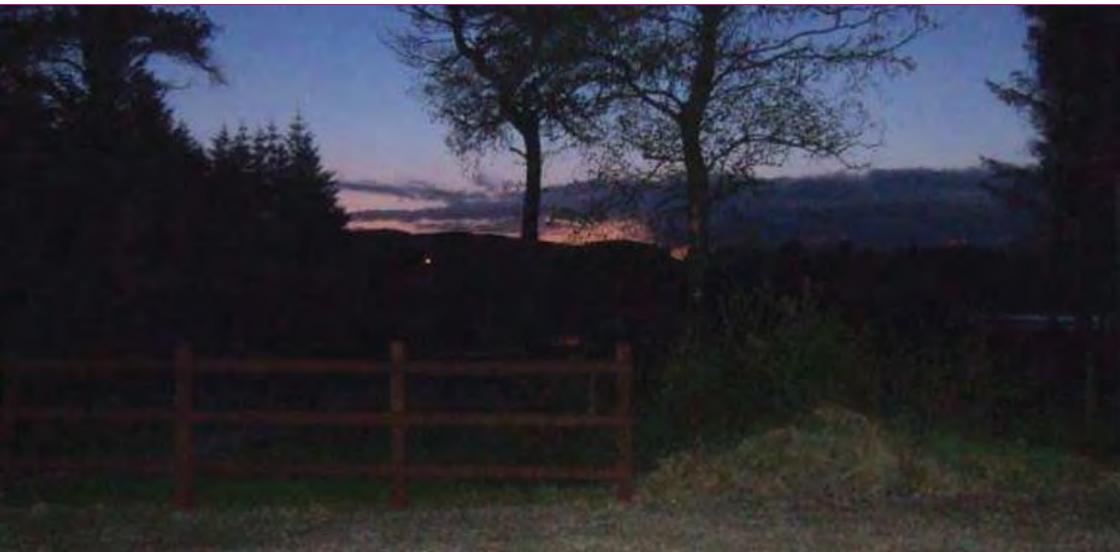


Amazing Mammals

We all love to sit in our gardens on a warm summer evening with family and friends when the swallows and swifts are slowly replaced by bats against the night sky.

These amazing mammals live in close proximity to humans using our gardens for water, food and shelter.

We might not realize it, but these small creatures play an important role in keeping our environment healthy. This makes them important for our own wellbeing. Bats are nature's pest controllers! One bat can eat up to 3,500 midges in one night. They make great guests at any BBQ, campsite or evening walk!



Your garden

- a haven for bats

Gardens can be wonderful places for people and wildlife, particularly bats. A garden that is good for insects is good for bats. All species of bat in Ireland 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!



A Batty café

Gardens can be thought of as cafés for bats – it's where they love to go to eat! Flying uses a lot of energy, so bats have huge appetites! For example, a tiny common pipistrelle can eat around 3,500 midges in a single night. Moths, beetles and craneflies (daddy-long-legs) are popular with other species, but flies are the main food for most bats.

The key to a successful wildlife garden is to include plenty of plants that will attract insects, and will provide great food source for bats.

Choose the right plants

By planting a mixture of flowering plants, vegetables, trees and shrubs you can encourage more insects to visit from spring to autumn. Native plants tend to support far more species of insect than hybrids or exotics, so they should be used as much as possible.

Different plants attract different types of insects. Flowers with long narrow petal tubes, such as evening primrose and honeysuckle, are visited by moths; only their long tongues can reach deep down to the hidden nectar. Short tongued insects include many families of flies and some moths; they can only reach nectar in flowers with short florets.

Try to include some of the following:

- Flowers that vary not only in colour and fragrance, but also in shape.
- Pale flowers that are more easily seen in poor light, so attracting insects at dusk.
- Single flowers, which tend to produce more nectar than double varieties.
- Flowers with insect-friendly landing platforms and short florets, like those in the daisy or carrot families.

GIVE THEM A HELPING HAND – WING!



Looking after your visitors



A problem often faced by bats in gardens is cats. If you own a cat, you can help to save lives by bringing your cat in for the night half an hour before sunset.

This will allow bats to emerge from their roosts undisturbed. This is especially important from mid-June to the end of August, which is when bats are rearing their young. The bats will also be able to return at dawn undisturbed by cats. If you find a bat that appears to have been injured by a cat, call the Bat Helpline (0845 1300 228) for details of your nearest bat carer or visit www.bats-ni.org.uk.

Plant trees and shrubs



These are important in providing food for insect larvae and adult insects, shelter for flying insects and roosting opportunities for bats. In a small

garden, choose trees that can be coppiced every few years – to allow new shoots to spring from the base.

Young shoots and leaves will support leaf-eating insects.

Create a wet area



No wildlife garden would be complete without a water feature. Not only will a small pond, marshy area or even a bog garden provide

bats with somewhere to drink, but they will also attract insects, as many of the tiny flies favoured by bats start life in water as aquatic larvae. Marginal plants can be planted around the pond to create soft edges and encourage insects further. Goldfish should definitely be avoided as they eat the insect larvae. If you have a small garden you could create a pond in a bucket! All you need is a bucket and some aquatic plants.

Make a compost heap or log pile



Recycle kitchen and garden waste – such as fruit and vegetable trimmings, annual

weeds and lawn clippings to produce useful garden compost, as well as an ideal habitat for insects.

A log pile in a damp, shady spot will also encourage insects, particularly beetles.

Avoid using pesticides

Chemical pesticides kill non-target beneficial invertebrates including natural predators and so may do more harm than good. They reduce bats' insect prey.

Encourage natural predators

Hoverflies, wasps, ladybirds, lacewings, ground beetles and centipedes are the gardener's friends and are natural pest controllers. Follow these suggestions to help maintain a natural balance:

- Allow some weeds to grow to provide ground cover for natural predators.
- Leave hollow-stemmed plants to overwinter as shelter for ladybirds.
- Leave heaps of dead leaves and brushwood undisturbed for hedgehogs.
- Provide regular food and water for garden birds, as they are also effective pest controllers



Some top tips for bat friendly gardening:

- Pesticide-free gardens tend to be better for wildlife and bats.
- Wherever possible, try to choose native plants and trees.
- Never dig up plants from the wild. Buy native plants from reputable suppliers who breed their own stock.
- Use peat-free compost or peat-substitutes such as coir. Peat extraction is unsustainable and seriously damages our unique bog habitats. Gardeners can help by reducing the demand for this product.
- Creating a range of habitats such as a pond, vegetable garden and hedgerow makes your garden more attractive to insects and in turn bats.
- Add a seat, put your feet up and watch your garden come to life!
- Hedge and tree lines are important to help bats navigate.
- Use lighting sensitively in your garden and do not point it at a bat box or roost.

Bat friendly gardening

Trees, shrubs and climbers

- Bramble (climber)
- Common alder
- Dog rose (climber)
- Elder (small)
- English oak (large gardens only)
- Guelder rose (shrub)
- Hawthorn (suitable for coppicing)
- Hazel (suitable for coppicing)
- Honeysuckle (native honeysuckle)
- Ivy (climber)
- Rowan
- Silver birch

Wildflowers

- Creeping Jenny (spring to summer)
- Flag iris
- Hemp agrimony (summer)
- Lady's smock (spring to summer)
- Marsh marigold (spring)
- Marsh woundwort
- Meadowsweet
(summer to early autumn)
- Purple loosestrife (summer)



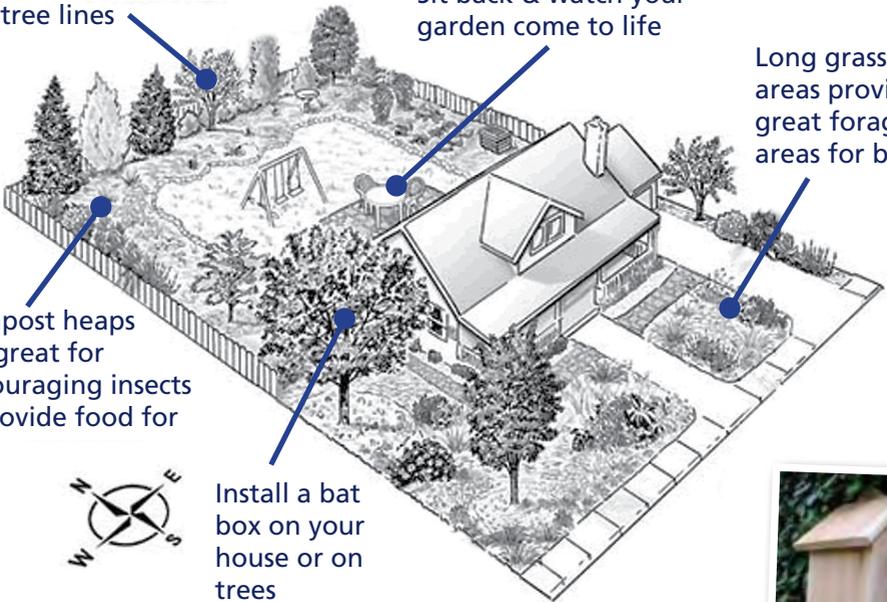
bats love hedgerows
and tree lines

Sit back & watch your
garden come to life

Long grass
areas provide
great foraging
areas for bats

Compost heaps
are great for
encouraging insects
& provide food for
bats

Install a bat
box on your
house or on
trees



Give a bat a home

Bat boxes

Bat boxes are artificial roosts designed to encourage bats into areas where there are few roosting sites, such as holes in trees or buildings. There are various designs of bat box, some that can be made at home and some that are available commercially. Different bat species also need different spaces.



Making your own bat box

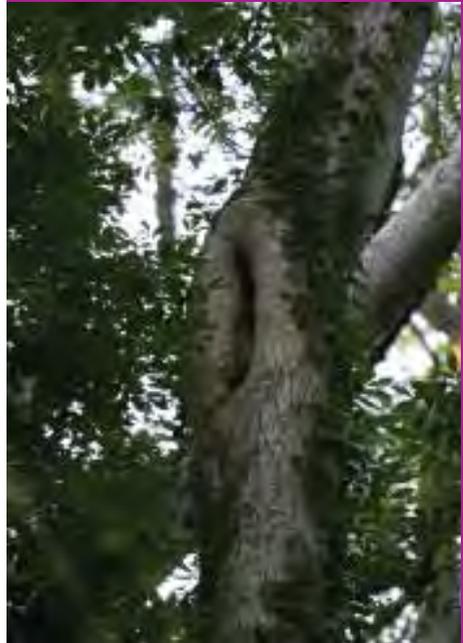
Bats do not like draughts, and prefer well insulated boxes where temperature and humidity remain constant. They also need a rough textured wood to cling to.

The wood should not be treated because bats are very sensitive to chemicals. A 'bat ladder' or other landing area that leads to an entry slit wide enough to admit bats, but narrow enough to keep out predators is also essential (15 – 20 mm).

Once up, a bat box cannot be opened legally without a licence. For more information on bats and the law call the Bat Helpline (**0845 1300 228**).



Photo courtesy of
Hugh Clark/Bat Conservation Trust



Things to remember:

- Make sure joints are well sealed and avoid large, loose-fitting front panels
- All timber used in bat boxes should be roughsawn (unplaned) and untreated from sustainable sources
- Keep entrance slits small (15 -20mm)
- Removable lids should not be used and the box should not be opened

Designs and instructions for making your own bat box can be found at www.bats.org.uk.

Putting up your box

Boxes are more likely to be used if they are located where bats are known to feed. Ideally, several boxes should be put up facing in different directions to provide a range of conditions. Some bats use a tree line or hedgerow for navigation. Putting boxes near these features may help the bats find the box. Boxes should be put as high as possible in sheltered sunny places. On buildings, boxes should be placed as close to the eaves as possible.

Locate boxes:

- where bats are known to feed close to hedges and tree lines
- at least 4 or 5m above the ground
- sheltered from strong winds and exposed to the sun for part of the day (usually S/SW)



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.

The Northern Ireland Bat Group may be able to provide you with a free bat box
Visit www.bats-ni.org.uk or www.creggancountrypark.com for contact details



**Northern Ireland
BAT GROUP**



Bats in Northern Ireland

For more information on bats in Northern Ireland, for advice or to request talks for community groups and schools please visit:
www.bats-ni.org.uk

Creggan Country Park is the North West headquarters for the Northern Ireland Bat Group. The park offers free environmental education workshops to schools and community groups including bat themed activities. For more information or to book, visit: **www.creggancountrypark.com**

Photos courtesy of Bat Conservation Trust, Austin Hopkirk, John Altringham, Hugh Clark and Karen Healy