

Bats Contribute to Backyard Conservation



More than 1100 bat species inhabit the world. Each species plays a vital role in the ecosystem. The diversity of size and diet among bats is astounding, and their ecological value is priceless. Activities such as seed dispersal, crop and native plant pollination, and insect population balance are just a few benefits of these creatures.

There are 10 species of bats found in Ohio, including the state and federally listed endangered Indiana bat. All of Ohio's bats eat only insects, and they are essential to keeping night-flying insect populations in control. They can help reduce pest insects that damage crops and gardens. One bat can eat hundreds of insects in just an hour during the night, and bats in Ohio love to eat mosquitoes.

Education and conservation of bats is necessary to their survival and our benefit from them. Their habitats are increasingly becoming scarce and threatened. One way to help bat populations is to create a bat garden and/or bat house at home. A bat garden consists of plants that attract night-flying insects, and a bat house is where bats may roost. Bats also need a water source near their habitat, which can be something similar to a "bird bath" or even an existing pond.

Plants in bat gardens invite insects by the fragrance that is emitted when they open their flowers at dusk. Common plants that can be used for a bat garden include: *Ipomoea alba* (moonflower), *Mentha spicata* (spearmint), *Silene regia* (royal catchfly), *Centaurea cyanus* (cornflower), *Phlox paniculata* (fall phlox), *Salvia splendens* (scarlet sage), *Nicotiana glauca* (jasmine tobacco), and *Mirabilis jalapa* (common four o'clock). Mayflies, beetles, mosquitoes, moths, flies, and midges may be attracted to these plants and can be a very substantial diet for bats attracted to a bat garden. Use of heavy pesticides should be avoided, as bats are very sensitive to these chemicals. Bats and birds will not compete for food, space, or water, and this should not be a concern with this backyard project. Bat conservation projects can be educational, interesting, and ecologically valuable.



Bat Facts

-  Only 0.01% of bats carry rabies. A person has a better chance of contracting rabies from dogs, cats, raccoons, opossum, or skunks.
-  Bats are **not** blind. They have eyes similar to ours, so they use echolocation to move around in the dark.
-  The largest bat in the United States is called a western mastiff bat. It weighs 2 ounces and has a wingspan of 2 feet.
-  Bats live in mines, caves, trees, giant tropical tree leaves, under tree bark, woodpecker holes, attics, and abandoned buildings.
-  Bats live on all continents except for Antarctica. 70% of them eat insects.

For more information on bats, bat conservation, and bat houses:

Bat Conservation International
www.batcon.org

America's Neighborhood Bats,
by Merlin D. Tuttle

Bat House Builder's Handbook, by Merlin D. Tuttle