

## Creating a bat-friendly garden

There are 17 species of British bats and all have been recorded living in and around people's houses. Sadly bat populations in the UK have dropped dramatically in recent years due to loss of habitats, use of insecticides and changes in farming practices. Although you can never guarantee that bats will come to your garden there are methods you can use to encourage them.

Careful planning will attract a variety of birds and insects which in turn should bring bats. Bats feed on insects and require a continuous food supply all through the summer, as well as shelter all year round. So in order to attract bats, first you need to attract the insects that they prey on.

### Plant flower borders

Insects will be attracted by nectar, seeds, fruit and vegetation and these in turn can attract bats. Night scented flowers such as night-scented stock, honeysuckle and evening primrose will help attract night flying insects and as a result, bats. Wildflowers planted around your borders will also help.



Pipistrelle bat - Credit Harry Hogg



Brown long-eared bat - Credit Helen Holford

### Add a tree or shrub

In the wild, woodland edges are the prime habitat for insects, as they provide both shelter and warmth. Try to replicate this in your garden - even if it is small, plant at least one tree or shrub if you can.

Ensure trees are native breeds, as these are more likely to be attractive to insects. Species like silver birch and willow are quick-growing and will attract many insects.

### Include a shelter belt

Rows of bushes or trees can be created or improved, encouraging concentrations of insects and providing a feeding area for bats. Try to make sure there are natural gaps in the hedges and train climbers up walls and fences using trellis or canes, to provide potential roosting sites.

### Build a pond

Many bat species feed on tiny flies that start life in the water as aquatic larvae. One pipistrelle bat may eat up to 3,000 such insects in one night so a pond is a great way to attract bats.

For more information on creating a wildlife friendly pond take a look at our 'Build a Pond' factsheet.



## Put up a bat box

Bat boxes act as artificial tree holes and offer an additional option for bats searching for a roost site. Bat boxes are not the same as bird boxes and are usually cubic or wedgeshaped, with the entrance located underneath the box, in the shape of a narrow slot.

The box should be placed as high up as possible and should be at least four to five metres off the ground. They are usually made from wood or woodcrete (a mixture of woodchips and concrete) and all materials that are used should be rough cut in order to give the bats plenty to hold on to. The exception to this is around the joints where it is essential that the box is well insulated. Boxes are most likely to be successful if they are located in a place where bats would hunt. It is essential that the opening of the box is clear of all obstacles as bats require a clear flight path in.

## Be patient

As with many things like this you need to be patient and bats need time to find and explore new homes, therefore it may be several years before boxes have residents!



Bat box - Credit Jim Horsfall

Keep an eye out for droppings on the landing area and urine stains around the lower parts of the box. Keep listening out for chittering noises from inside the box on warm afternoons and evenings as these are also signs of occupation.

## Already got bats?

All 17 species of British bat's can get through a gap just 20mm wide meaning that their entrance points are often difficult to locate and easy to block during routine maintenance. So if you do manage to get bats roosting in your house make sure you know where they are! Also remember to avoid using chemicals, as certain insecticides may not only cancel out all the good you are doing to encourage bats but also harm them.

## Remember bats are protected

It's important to note that handling or disturbing bats without a licence is illegal! This includes in your own garden, meaning that once you have put a bat box up you cannot open it or move it without permission.

## Find out more

If you would like to find out more about Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and or how to become a member, plus more about the work we do for bats then contact us in the following ways:

A: 1 St George's Place, York, YO24 1GN

T: 01904 659570

E: [info@ywt.org.uk](mailto:info@ywt.org.uk)



@YorksWildlife



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