

Florida Bat Conservancy

Bat Belfrys Inc.

www.floridabats.org

Common Bat House Questions:

Where can I find good bat house plans...for free?

Bat Conservation International's website: www.batcon.org

What kind of wood can I use to build a bat house?

Wood used to build bat houses should be raw, untreated, and chemical-free. Oak, pine, birch, maple, or other non-aromatic woods can be used. Cedar is not recommended because of its highly aromatic oils. All bat houses should be stained and painted with water-based products to protect the wood from weather.

Where should I put my bat house?

Bat houses should be sited in clearings with at least 20 feet of open space in all directions, including up. There should be no overhanging tree branches, wires, antenna, rooflines, or other places where aerial predators could perch.

Bat houses should be faced east so morning sunlight will hit the face of the house and warm it up quickly; the house should get 5-6 hours of direct sunlight every day.

How high does the bat house need to be?

Bat houses should be at least 12 feet above the ground.

What can I do to attract bats to my bat house?

Leave outdoor lights on at night to attract insects, but don't use "bug lights", stop using pesticides and other yard chemicals, and bring pets indoors to keep bats safe. The use of native plants in your landscape will encourage wildlife activity.

Won't bats get too hot if the bat house is in the sun?

Bats have the ability to thermo-regulate by lowering their body temperature, heart rate, and respirations to conserve energy. This helps them in both warm and cool weather so unless you live in the equatorial zone it's unlikely that bats will overheat. It's not uncommon to see bats congregating at the lower third of the house during very hot weather; they may even pant like dogs! But large bat houses (3 or 4 chambers) tend to offer more temperature variations that bats can take advantage of year-round.

What kind of maintenance do bat houses require?

Bat houses generally require minimal maintenance; the use of a good quality exterior latex paint and a shingled roof will greatly extend the life the house. A well-made bat house shouldn't require any maintenance until its 5th or 6th year, but if peeling paint, cracks, or broken wood is visible the bat house should be lowered and repaired.

I have my bat house hung in a tree because I've seen bats there; why aren't they using the bat house?

There are two types of bats in Florida "colonizing" species and "tree" species.

Colonizing bats form fairly large social groups and live in a shared roost. Examples of these species are the Brazilian free-tailed bat and the Evening bat; these are bats that will occupy a bat house.

Tree bats live solitary lives and generally roost in cabbage palm boots and fronds, Spanish moss, and amid the bark of old-growth trees. These bats include Seminole bats, Yellow bats, and Eastern red bats. These bats live a lifestyle which doesn't include occupying a bat house.

Bat houses shouldn't be attached to trees because foliage shades the house and interferes with the solar heating that bats require. In addition, the colonizing species that use bat houses are at high risk for predation since most bat predators can easily climb a tree and invade the house.

There's a dead bat on the ground near my bat house. What should I do?

Never touch or handle any wildlife with bare hands, even if you believe it's dead. Baby bats can sometimes fall from the roost and may lay motionless, waiting for Mom to retrieve it. Injured or sick bats can appear dead until touched and pain or fear may cause the bat to bite.

ALWAYS wear gloves if you're forced to handle a grounded bat. If the bat is still alive place it in a small box padded with clean rags (not terrycloth) and loosely cover the box; call a local wildlife hospital or rehabilitator immediately.

If the bat is dead, dispose of it by burial or wrap it in newspaper and place in the trash.

There were bats in my bat house but now they're gone. Why did they leave and where did they go?

Bats move from summer roosts to winter roosts and back again in early spring. Depending on latitude, bats can start seeking winter roosts as early as August and in southern latitudes it's not uncommon for bats to remain in the bat house year-round.

Bats have a high degree of roost loyalty so it's probable that the bats will return to a house in the spring; if they don't, it's possible the colony has outgrown the house or the house is in need of repair. Take the opportunity to inspect the bat house for soundness while the bats are absent.

I want to build a BIG bat house...like the one at UF. Where can I get plans?

Large community bat houses are not very successful in Florida; only a few of the dozen or more large structures are used by bats. One of these is the UF bat house in Gainesville. It has taken nearly 25 years for the UF bat colony to grow to its current size.

There are compelling reasons to believe that mega bat houses aren't the best choice for Florida's bats; first, consider Florida's geography. Our state is a nearly even mix of uplands and wetlands, a perfect blend for lots of insect variety. We enjoy a warm, damp climate for most of the year - also great conditions for insects and for keeping our fresh water sources active breeding grounds year-round.

Because the natural resources that bats need - food, water, and shelter - are more or less evenly distributed across the Florida landscape, there may be no environmental incentive for bats to build super-colonies of many thousands of individuals. In fact, bats are a prey animal as well as a predator and small dispersed colonies may be better able to mask their presence from predators like snakes, bobcats, raccoons, and raptors. This lifestyle is in sharp contrast to the super-colonies which form in the arid areas of the US where there is intense competition for water and food.

I'm an Eagle Scout candidate and my project is bat houses. Where can I find out more about bats and bat houses?

Bat Conservation International: www.batcon.org
Florida Bat Conservancy: www.floridabats.org
NC Museum of Natural History: <http://sites.naturalsciences.org/faqs/bats.html>
Organization for Bat Conservation: www.batconservation.org
The Nature Conservancy: www.nature.org/northamerica/placesweprotect.xml
Defenders of Wildlife: <https://www.defenders.org/bats/basic-facts>
Florida Museum of Natural History: <http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/bats/>
Bat World: www.batworld.org

I'm worried about diseases and bugs...someone told me all bats are rabid and will carry fleas and ticks into my yard!

The risk of contracting a disease from a bat is virtually zero if you don't handle them. It's estimated that bat rabies occurs in less than 1% of the bat population and the strain of rabies which infects bats rarely results in an aggressive animal. Instead, an infected bat will become paralyzed and fall from the roost, effectively isolating it from the rest of the colony. Since wild animals, dead or alive, should never be handled, there is no risk of contracting the disease.

Histoplasmosis, a respiratory infection caused by the inhalation of an airborne spore from a terrestrial fungus that grows on guano, does not occur in Florida. The Centers for Disease Control website, <http://www.cdc.gov/fungal/histoplasmosis/causes.html>, shows the range of the disease and since Florida is outside of the endemic range for this fungus, the risk of infection is virtually zero. Teaching children not to touch or play with bat droppings reduces the risk even further.

I have a butterfly garden/honey bee hives/vegetable garden/organic farm. Will bats bother my butterflies/bees/pollinators?

Bats consume thousands of insects every night but they only eat those insects which are active between sunset and sunrise. Because most daytime pollinators like butterflies and bees are already inactive by the time bats emerge, there is virtually no danger that bats will eat them. Bats aren't territorial or aggressive so disputes over feeding areas are rare.

Where can I buy a good bat house?

There are many types and styles of bat houses available at internet stores and home improvement centers but most of them do not meet the bat's needs, which means they won't succeed in attracting a colony. Be careful to purchase a bat house that the bats will find attractive. A completed bat house can be purchased from Bat Belfrys Inc. Telephone: 321-890-6154. All proceeds from the sale of these bat houses supports bat conservation in Florida and the Florida Bat Conservancy.

