

## **FACT SHEET: Going Batty**

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(Adapted from: Bats of Florida by Ginger M. Allen and Martin B. Main  
and Effective Bat Houses for Florida by Holly K. Ober)



Florida bats, [floridashealth.com](http://floridashealth.com) fertilizer for ground-dwelling cave life.

Attracting wildlife is the seventh principle of the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program. Unfortunately, a lack of bat facts is leading to their decline, if not demise. Habitat destruction, harmful pesticides and nesting colony disturbances have led to the endangerment of three Florida bat species: the gray bat, Indiana bat and Mastiff bat. Bats, an important part of natural pest control, consume rootworms, cutworms, corn borer moths, potato beetles, mosquitoes and grasshoppers. They are important in scientific research regarding hibernation and sonar. And, their guano (or excrement) provides nutrient-rich

### **Bat Facts:**

By day, bats take shelter in foliage, under tree bark, in caves, mines, buildings and rock crevices. Many assemble in nursery colonies in the spring, leaving in July and August to begin their trek to hibernation sites. Up to 300 bats per square foot can cluster hibernate. If hibernation is interrupted too many times, a bat may not be able to survive the winter due to the decrease in fat reserves.

Bats are the only mammals capable of true flight. By night, bats are uniquely equipped to catch flying insects, using their wings, skin around their tails and mouths. Bats locate their food sources and travel by making ultrasonic sounds that echo off solid objects. This same technique is used by dolphins.

Most Eastern bat species produce one bat baby per year, while other species produce two to four. Female colony bats create a nursery prior to giving birth. When the mothers all crowd together, the nursery temperature is greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Baby bats are furless and need a warm and humid place to survive. Colony-roosting bats have less colorful and thinner fur than solitary or foliage-roosting bats. Baby bats, like other mammals, feed on milk until able to secure food on their own.

### **Bat Houses Site Selection:**

Bat houses keep bats warm, dry and safe while sleeping during the day. Bats prefer temperatures between 80 to 100 degrees Fahrenheit. If the temperature is not comfortable, bats will not inhabit the house. If no habitation after three or more years, either change the exterior color of the bat house or its location. Don't locate the bat house near bright lights or an area with much human activity.

You can install a bat house any time of year, but bats generally take up residency in early spring. If you install your bat house in the winter, it will be available when bats are seeking a new home. Bats are more attracted to houses mounted on the sides of buildings or poles than if tree-mounted because building-mounted bat houses provide more sun and less predator perch sites. Predators include owls, hawks and falcons.

Select the roost site near food and fresh water sources and a location where the sight or odor of the guano won't be an issue. Shovel guano periodically and use as landscape fertilizer. There is a high phosphorus content in guano and a risk of runoff or leaching if used directly on the ground. Guano is better used in potted plants, especially those that bloom. Locate the bat house at least 20 feet from potential predator perch sites and at least 12 feet off the ground.

Provide a wildlife bat habitat in your back yard which will give you and your family hours of educational entertainment and significantly less insects! For additional information on the identification of Florida bats and how to build your own bat house, please access:

Bats of Florida:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/UW/UW20300.pdf>

Effective Bat Houses of Florida:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/UW/UW29000.pdf>

More gardening information is available at <http://hillsborough.extension.ufl.edu> and <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>