

WOODWORKING FOR WILDLIFE

BAT HOUSE

The idea of building a house for bats is not as far-fetched as it may sound, once bats are understood. Their desirable qualities exceed even those of the popular purple martin. While some people erroneously claim that purple martins eat up to a thousand mosquitoes per day, the fact is that their mosquito consumption is much lower because martins don't actively feed when mosquitoes are most active. In contrast, bats do. A single, big, brown bat can eat 3,000 to 7,000 mosquitoes each night!

The most critical dimension of a bat house is the three-fourth-inch width of

the entry space. All inner surfaces must be roughened with a chisel or saw cuts to permit bats to climb them with ease. Rough outer surfaces are needed to give the bats a good toe-hold when landing and launching into flight.

Daytime temperatures in the bat house must be very hot – about 80 F to 90 F. Bat houses should be oriented to receive maximum solar radiation, especially in the morning. Preferred sites are also protected from wind. Ideally a bat house should be mounted on the southeast side of a building or tree, roughly 12 to 15 feet about the ground.

The best habitat for bat house placement is near a permanent source of water where insects abound. The closer a bat house is to a marsh, lake, river or farm pond, the greater the probability of being used. In addition to the presence of nearby water, the habitat chosen for box placement should be at least 40 percent unforested within a 180-acre area.

Bat houses should be placed by early February. If bats do not find or use the house within 2 years, move the house to another location. Once occupied, houses should not be disturbed and need not be cleaned.

