



BAT CONSERVATION
IRELAND

GARDENING FOR BATS



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Gardens cover a huge area of the Irish landscape, and more and more homeowners are recognising the importance of their own gardens for helping wildlife. In this leaflet, not only will Bat Conservation Ireland provide some tips and ideas on how to encourage bats to your garden, but we will also help you to do less work and put your feet up! Less trimming, mowing, spraying and leaf raking means less effort but doing more to help wildlife thrive in Ireland!

WHY ARE GARDENS IMPORTANT FOR BATS?

Gardens provide food

A garden is a green space that may be available to wildlife for foraging. Flying insects – the food of Irish bats – tend to be present in most gardens. Gardens are particularly important in urban landscapes where so much of the land is otherwise covered in concrete and buildings.

In areas of intensive agriculture where fields provide little refuge for wildlife, the same can also be true. Bats often fly along boundary walls or hedges eating insects there. On windy days, insects swarm to the lee side of hedges and bats will fly along, sheltered from the wind, while having a tasty snack.

Gardens provide shelter

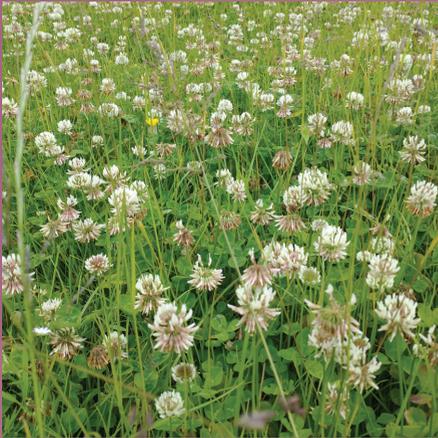
Bats sometimes roost in the crevices and cavities of mature and ivy-covered garden trees, but also in roofs of domestic houses or in sheds/outbuildings.



Oxeye daisies

Gardens tend to be dark at night

Bats usually avoid street lighting so, if the front of your house is on a brightly lit street, you are far more likely to observe bats in your unlit back garden.



White clover

Improving or managing a garden for bats

1. Mindset. This is the first thing to tackle. Take one step at a time. Decide what level of change you will be happy with. Making bat (and other wildlife) friendly changes do not have to encompass the whole garden, the changes can be

small e.g. just in one corner or along one boundary. Even so, you may need to modify how you think about your garden in that area.

2. Native species. Native plants are ones that spread to Ireland naturally since the last Ice Age. These support a wider variety and abundance of native insects. This in turn means that there is more food for bats. Include as many native species and specimens as possible. For a list of native tree and shrub species that will benefit bats, see the last page of this leaflet. If you have a hedgerow bounding your garden, try to retain native shrubs such as hawthorn, hazel and willow, instead of replacing them with evergreen non-natives.

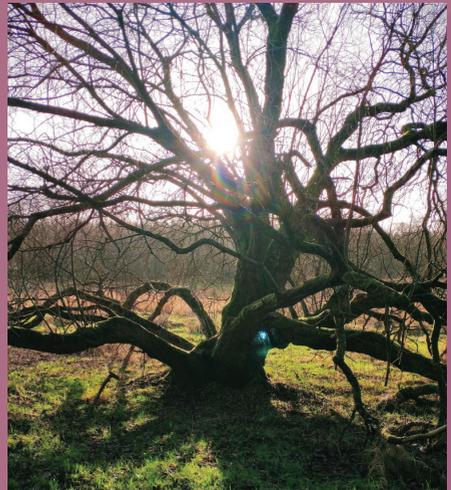
3. Management – trimming & cutting. Allowing patches or edges of lawns to grow tall and flower will improve the garden for night flying insects such as moths. Trimming hedgerows that have native shrubs such as hawthorn

less often will increase bat activity and have a knock-on effect of improving the hedgerow for songbirds. Trim outside of the bird nesting season (March 1st to August 31st).

4. Management – sprays. With the exception of controlling invasive exotic species (like Japanese knotweed), there is rarely a real need to spray pesticides in a domestic setting. While herbicide may not impact bats directly it reduces potential food sources for various insect species and this in turn will negatively impact on bats and many other animals. Always avoid using herbicidal, insecticidal or fungicidal sprays anywhere near hedgerows, ditches, ponds or waterways.

5. Management – lawn clippings and autumn leaves. Did you know that dead autumn leaves provide habitat for lots of creepy crawlies? If you want to keep your lawn leaf-free, rake leaves into a

pile in a corner of the garden to rot down into a leaf mulch, rather than disposing of them or burning them. That way, you get to use the results as compost in a couple of years and bugs get to complete their life cycles in your garden – a win win situation! And why not put all those lawn and other garden clippings to work for you in a compost pile AND save money on bought compost?



6. Trees. A wider variety of bat species are more likely to be found where there are mature trees. Trees also provide

potential roosting locations. Retain mature trees and if there are none at present, allow some to develop to maturity if you have space. If tree surgery is necessary for safety reasons, retain the tree trunk and keep pieces of dead wood in your garden to provide more habitats for invertebrates.



Pond

7. Night scented and pale flowers. Many flowers release scent after sundown and attract night-time pollinators. Also, some of the pale and blue/purple flowered plants

are particularly attractive to night flying insects. Examples of night- time insect-friendly flowers are shown on the last page.

8. Ponds – incorporating a water feature into your garden could provide a real boost to wildlife in your garden. Ponds are used by bats for drinking and many insects have an aquatic larval stage so a pond will increase insect numbers for feeding bats.

9. Bat boxes – boost roosts! You can increase the potential roosts available to your local bats by providing roost boxes.

10. Mind the gap! If you have the option of planting a hedge along a boundary, consider planting hawthorn to provide more cover for slow flying bat species. Its beautiful creamy flowers attract night-time pollinators and their fruits (haws) provide food for lots of bird species.

11. Lighting – most Irish bat species are deterred by artificial light at night. Keep outdoor lights to a minimum and only switch them on when you need them.

12. Cats – we all love our pets, but they can injure or even kill bats. Please keep your cat indoors from half an hour before sundown until after sunrise, the times when bats are active.

BAT FRIENDLY PLANTING

Select species that are suitable for growing in your soil conditions. Consider drainage, waterlogging, soil type and pH. If you are unsure, seek advice from a horticulturalist.

Garden centres very often supply varieties of native species that have been artificially selected for certain features, for example to have more showy flowers. So, if for example, you ask for guelder

rose you may get a double-petalled version rather than the wild version, which will be pretty but will be less useful to insect pollinators and may not produce berries in the autumn. For this reason, always ask for native species of local, or at least Irish, provenance. Or you can collect cuttings and seeds from local hedgerows and raise your plants for free.



Honeysuckle

A selection of tree species native to Ireland (soil requirements)

Pedunculate Oak – *Quercus robur* (fertile, neutral or heavy)

Sessile Oak – *Quercus petraea* (neutral or acid soil)

Alder – *Alnus glutinosa* (heavy or waterlogged soil, river / stream banks)

Scots pine – *Pinus sylvestris* (acid, neutral, well-drained soil)

Silver birch – *Betula pendula* (acid soil, peat)

Downy birch – *Betula pubescens* (acid soil, peat)

Yew – *Taxus baccata* (fertile, neutral, well-drained soil)

Wild cherry – *Prunus avium* (fertile, neutral, well-drained soil)

Crab apple – *Malus sylvestris* (neutral, well-drained or heavy)

Rowan (mountain ash) – *Sorbus aucuparia* (sub-fertile, well-drained)

Willows – e.g. *Salix caprea*, *Salix aurita*, *Salix pentandra*, *Salix cinerea*

NOTE: Ash - *Fraxinus excelsior* is one of Ireland's most common native tree species. However, due to the prevalence of ash dieback disease, this species is not currently recommended for planting.

Shrub species native to Ireland

Hawthorn – *Crataegus monogyna*

Blackthorn – *Prunus spinosa*

Guelder rose – *Viburnum opulus*

Holly – *Ilex aquifolium*

Hazel – *Corylus avellana*

Elder – *Sambucus nigra*

Spindle – *Euonymus europaeus*

Broom – *Cytisus scoparius*

Furze – *Ulex europaeus*

Examples of flowering plants attractive to night-time insects

Honeysuckle - *Lonicera periclymenum*

Wild roses – e.g. *Rosa canina*, *Rosa arvensis*

Jasmine – *Jasminum officinale*

Brambles – *Rubus fruticosus*

Forget me not – *Myosotis arvensis*

White clover – *Trifolium repens*

Red clover – *Trifolium pratense*

Primroses – *Primula vulgaris*

Red valerian – *Centranthus ruber*

Irish bluebells – *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*



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