

It's not all Doom and Gloom - you can help bats at home!

In this article we take a look at what you can do in your garden, or in any green space that you are involved in managing, to help our nocturnal friends.

Last one to leave turn out the lights! Artificial light at night affects entire ecosystems; it attracts swarming insects and stops them completing their lifecycles; When it lights up waterways, it can affect how invertebrates move around underwater and most of our bats usually avoid it because they are more at risk of predation if they fly in brightness. For these reasons, we suggest that any nighttime lights in gardens or outdoors are kept to a minimum, switched off when they are not needed, or just come in with a sensor. Using up-lighting for a pretty view is a definite no-no, particularly if the building is a bat roost.

- Keep that hedge! Hedgerows are so important for bats. Not only do they help bats navigate around in the dark, but they also provide camouflage for our furry friends against owl predation AND, extra bonus, meals of insect prey swarming around in the shelter! If you want to plant a hedgerow, native species are definitely top of the class for wildlife: Hawthorn, blackthorn, elder, willows, guelder rose, hazel, holly, ash, oak and crab apple all support a wide variety of insects and food for many species including songbirds. Plus, you can also look forward to crab apple jelly, elder flower cordial, sloe gin and your own holly for Christmas! Even if you don't want to add a hedgerow, adding broadleaved trees and native shrubs benefit bats who prefer to fly in cover more than in wide open spaces with bare lawns.



White street lights at sundown (By Dmitry G
- Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0)



Caption: Native guelder rose
berries in an
Irish hedgerow (c Niamh Roche)

- Gardening for pollinators also helps bats! Since bats eat insects, any garden management that promotes insect abundance and diversity will also have a positive impact on bats. The All Ireland Pollinator Plan (2012) and the leaflets and booklets produced by the National Biodiversity Data Centre are a fantastic resource, see: www.biodiversityireland.ie for more information. Consider a reduced mowing regime for your lawn or maintaining the edges as a meadow.



Heather and Isabelle playing in their wildflower meadow (c Niamh Roche)

- Hold off on chemical sprays! While glyphosate herbicide (e.g. Roundup) can help conservation efforts in dealing with invasive plants such as giant hogweed, for the most part, they are unnecessary in a domestic garden and will negatively affect soil life and pollinators. Think before spraying those little dandelions – are they really so bad? Could a hoe do the same job?



Dandelions, essential food source for early season pollinators (By Timo Newton-Syms CC BY-SA 2.0)

- Consider adding a water feature. A bird drinker, or even better, a pond, can be a great feature for all kinds of wildlife. Ponds provide bats with a place to drink and many insects have an aquatic larval stage so a pond will help boost insect numbers for feeding bats. This information from the NGO Froglife has great information about creating a wildlife pond. <https://www.froglife.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/JAW2014-for-printing-HLF1.pdf>.



Wildlife pond created for a garden at Bloom in 2016 by the talented Barry Kavanagh, a BC Ireland volunteer (c Niamh Roche)

- Provide a house for bats! There are many different brands and types of bat boxes now available. You could have a go at making one yourself (see [https://www.batconservationireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Leaflet_3_batboxes.p df](https://www.batconservationireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Leaflet_3_batboxes.pdf)) or perhaps ask your local Men's Shed to help you out. When you have one make sure to place it where bats won't be at risk of cat predation, at a height of +3m, preferably facing roughly south - south-east to south-west and with no clutter for a couple of metres underneath the entrance, so the bats can take off unhindered.



Daubenton's bat leaving bat box
© Paul van Hoof.

We hope you enjoyed this article and it inspires you to do what you can in your garden to encourage bat activity!

10th Irish Bat Conference 2020

Date: 17 and 18 October 2020

Location: Athlone Springs Hotel

To be followed by a Vampire Ball on the night of Saturday 17 October 2020

Make sure to save the date!