Building a BAT House

USDA Forest Service Hoosier National Forest 4/2011



Bats sleep in caves, hollow trees, barns and attics during the day. At night they fly out to catch mosquitoes and moths. They're wonderful natural bug zappers, but often get a bad reputation. Most people can't imagine that attracting bats to your property would be a good idea, but it is!

Bats are one of the most misunderstood animals around. People imagine them to be blood-sucking, rabies-ridden, hair-tangling, night-stalking, loathsome creatures. The truth is, very few (less than 1 percent) carry rabies. Even fewer are bold enough to come near people, much less dive-bomb a hairdo or suck your blood. Others are listed as endangered.

Bug Patrol

It's bugs they're after, and they've got insatiable appitites when it comes to eating those bugs. They are reported to eat as many as 600 insects in an hour. By putting a bat house on your property, you may be able to provide a safe place for bats to live and you'll notice fewer mosquitoes and insects around your house or in your garden.

Suburbanites

Bat houses are most likely to attract the Little Brown and Big Brown bats. These are among the more hardy and adaptable species, and neither are on any endangered lists. There are a total of 11 different species of bats found on the Hoosier N.F. One is an endangered species - the Indiana bat. The Indiana bat has very specific habitat requirements and will roost only in caves or under the loose bark of trees.

The Little Brown and Big Brown bats thrive in suburbia. They are willing to inhabit any of a variety of man-made habitats such as barns, attics, church belfries, and home-made bat houses. The narrow slats give them a safe dark place to crawl in and sleep during the day.

Patience Required

Providing real estate for bats requires patience. It often takes 2 years for bats to occupy a new bat house, and even then, only about 15 percent will be occupied at any time. It's not a matter of "put up a house and they will come," because more than likely, they won't. Bats tend to be loyal to a roost site, so unless it's destroyed or becomes too crowded, a colony isn't likely to move to another location.

Whether or not your bat house is inhabited, by building one and putting it up, you're doing your part to help and encourage bats.

When it comes to bat houses, bigger is better. While bats like to live crowded together in small spaces, larger colonies can fit in larger houses, and more partitions give bats opportunities to find warmer or cooler walls within the house as weather changes.

For More Information:

Hoosier National Forest offices are open 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (EST), Monday through Friday.

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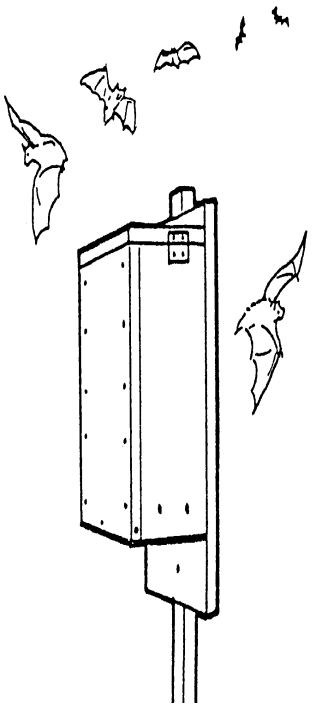
Tell City Ranger District Office
248 15th Street
Tell City, IN 47586
(812) 547-7051

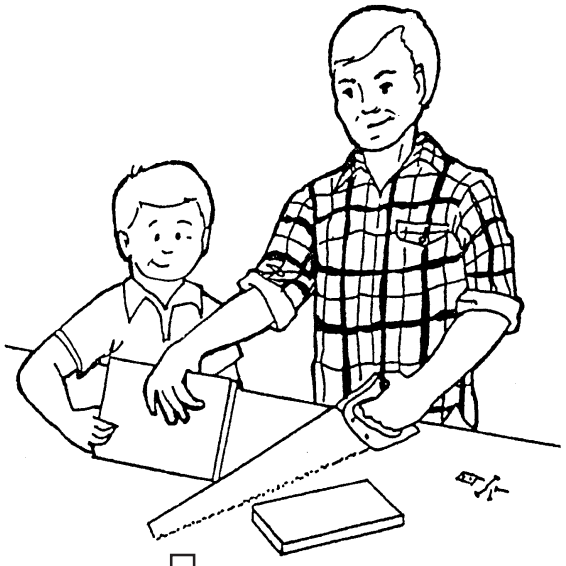
Building and putting up a Bat House

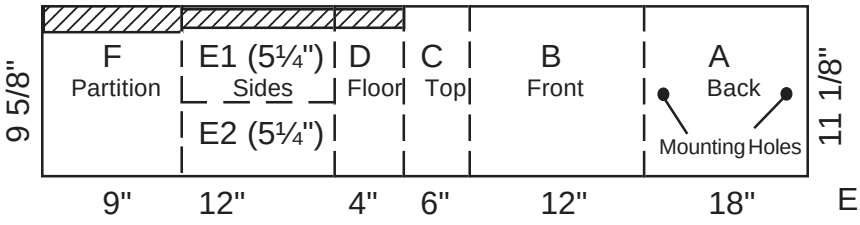
Bat houses should be hung at least 10, and preferably 15 feet above the ground. A warm east wall near vegetation and a water source is best. On an east wall they'll receive morning sun, but be shielded from the hot afternoon sun. They can also be placed on a pole, tree, or the side of a barn.

Easy to assemble bat house kits are available from the Boy Scouts of America or many garden centers. The directions below however are easy to follow. The exact size and shape are not that important except for the width of the opening which should not exceed one inch and ideally is only 3/4 inch. In constructing any bat houses no chemical treated wood should be used. Some lumber is treated with wood preservatives or insecticides which could be harmful to the bats. All inner surfaces of bat houses, regardless of the kind built, must be rough or horizontally grooved so the bats can get a firm foothold. If the wood is planed, you may wish to cut 1/16" horizontal grooves into teh surface of the smooth side of each roosting partition at about 1/2 inch intervals. Any planed surface of wood on the roof, front, back and sides should be turned to the outside of the box.

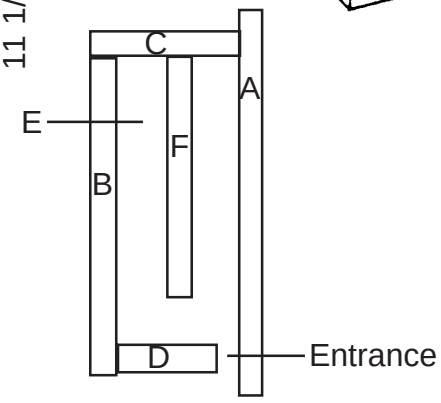
Once the house is up, if you're lucky, you may have bats within a few weeks, especially if the house is up in early spring.







Use 1" x 12" x 6' cedar or pine, rough side in. (The board will actually measure 3/4" x 11 1/8" x 6')



Put the bat house together with 1 5/8" screw or 6d nails as shown. Attach a hinge to one side of the roof and a latch on the opposite side to hold the top shut. Bats will sleep inside while holding on to the partition or sides. You may want to tack some thin scrap strips to the partition to give the bats a better foothold.

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