

Bats – Pest Management for Your Garden and Orchard
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Bats usually get a lot of attention at Halloween. However, savvy gardeners are looking at ways to encourage and support bats all year long because of their natural role in managing insect pests. Bats eat the insects that eat our crops. Favorite meals are cucumber beetles, codling moths, leafhoppers, mosquitoes and stink bugs. When female bats are pregnant or nursing, they will consume their own weight in insects on a daily basis. In fact, 1,000 bats will eat the equivalent of two brown-paper grocery bags full of insects each night. Bat feces, known as guano, is considered an excellent source of fertilizer.

Worldwide, there are over 1000 species of bats. The US has about 45 species, and in California we see around 24 species of bats. Depending on the species' habit, bats may live a solitary lifestyle or be part of a colony of thousands. Bats are the only mammal that exhibits true flight. Most female bats give birth to only one baby (known as a "pup") each year. Contrary to some popular myths, bats are not blind. North American bats see in black and white. In the dark they use echolocation to locate insects.

Bats are long-lived; their life span can be from between 20 and 30 years. Of the species found in the foothills, hibernation is the norm in the winter. Bats will even migrate to higher elevations and find mines and caves in which to hibernate. However, they are very loyal and will migrate back to their usual locale in the spring.

Their natural homes are in rock crevices, caverns, under the bark of trees, and in crevices under bridges. Their predators are snakes, skunks, raccoons and opossums, as well as, owls, hawks and housecats.

Bats have received a much negative attention due to rabies. However, the incidence of rabid bats is quite low. In fact, worldwide, most rabies deaths are due to contact with rabid dogs. An important reason to vaccinate your family pets! Nevertheless, because bats are mammals, they can contract rabies. Thus it is important to never handle a bat with your bare hands. If you handle a bat and are bitten, it is important to keep the bat alive for examination by the county health department (for rabies) and to seek immediate medical advice. Bats found on the ground are not always sick. Young bats have to learn to fly and may just have suffered a spill. If the bat is out of harm's way and won't be found by pets or children, consider leaving it alone for a few hours. If it needs to be moved, scoop it into a box or other container, wearing leather gloves so as not to touch the bat. Place the container where no one can come in contact with it.

Although it is not advisable to permit bats to nest or roost in homes or buildings occupied by people, bats rooting in barns or other outdoor buildings should not present a problem. You may even want to encourage bats on your property with the placement of artificial roosting sites or bat boxes. Bat boxes placed on the sides of buildings seem to have the

greatest success. However, they can be attached to poles in open areas as well. Sighting the box in a tree is not recommended because of temperature fluctuations caused by shading. Bat boxes should be located on an eastern or southerly exposure, receiving sun for at least six hours a day. Boxes should be placed from between 12 to 20 feet off the ground. For a comprehensive guide to bat box construction and installation, download this free University of Nebraska Extension Service publication at <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/g1575/build/g1575.pdf>.

Saturday, November 5th, Master Gardeners will present a class on “Selecting and Planting Roses”. Come to this free, three-hour class held in the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Dr., in Placerville, and learn about plants that make the holidays more festive. The class starts at 9:00 a.m.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.org/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.