

Why have a bat house?

Because the eight species of bats that live in Saskatchewan are all insect eaters!

The most common bat around Saskatchewan is the Big Brown Bat – actually quite small – with a weight range of 13 to 22 grams and wingspan of about 40 cm. The next most common is the Little Brown Bat weighing about 6-8 grams with a wingspan of 25 cm. But they can eat 600 mosquitoes an hour! A small colony could make a substantial difference to your backyard insect population. They also eat moths, beetles and midges. Bats emerge at dusk to feed, the time that our most pesky insects are out. That's natural West Nile Virus control!

Most bats are beneficial. Desert bats pollinate cactus blooms, tropical bats pollinate banana flowers and some fruit bats – which are very large, with a wingspan of a goose – harvest over ripe fruit, then transfer seeds to new locations, helping with rainforest regeneration. We all know about vampire bats drinking blood. But of the over 1100 species of bats worldwide, only 3 are vampires and they all live in tropical rainforest.

Our Big Brown and Little Brown bats are cave bats, but on the prairies caves are rare, so they are commonly found living in older wood or brick buildings mostly near water. They drink by skimming the water surface when they rouse at dusk. If they live in your house, at least they do not chew wires or move insulation like rodents. They may leave a greasy streak on the building where they enter, from a combination of urine stains and excretions from facial glands used in grooming to keep their wing membranes supple.

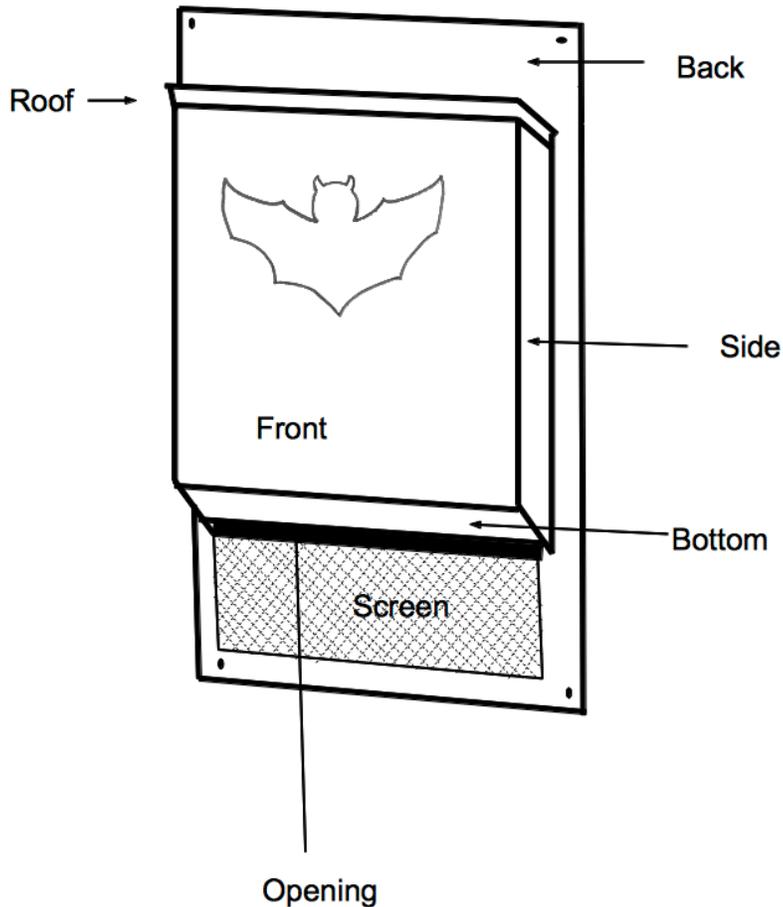
It's best to encourage them into a bat house set up at a height of 3 to 4 metres on an east or south facing wall of a building. Bat houses in trees are not so good as they are more subject to predation. Plus bats need a long swoop zone. They take off by merely releasing their toes, and dropping from their roost.

Bat boxes should have a dark exterior stain to help with heat build up and the wood surfaces should be left rough, so bats can cling to the surface as they land. Inside the box back is lined with plastic screen to allow them to crawl up inside to box. The opening is at the bottom, merely $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch, that's 2 cm.

The diagram shows the dimensions of the bat house parts and how they fit together. Best to follow this order in hammering. Once the plywood is cut, staple screen to the inside back, reaching right to the bottom of the wood. This is their landing pad. Then hammer the bottom to the front, add sides, then attach to the back. Last is the roof. All corners should fit together tightly, or you may use caulking to seal. Make sure the entrance slot is well sanded, and no stray nail tips stick out. To ease mounting, you can drill guide holes at the top and bottom. This is a great project for a grandparent and grandchildren, especially those that thrive on activity.

If you would like more bat information, check out www.batcon.org or www.batworld.org

Bat houses should be placed 4 – 5 m (10 – 15 feet) off the ground, facing east or southeast, away from trees.



Outside: DARK STAIN ONLY

ENTRY SPACE = $\frac{3}{4}$ " wide

BACK = 13 x 18" (330 X 458 mm)

FRONT = 12 x 12" (305 x 305 mm)

SIDES = 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 12" (x2) (115 x 305 mm)

ROOF = 13 x 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (330 x 140 mm)

BOTTOM = 11 x 3 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (280 x 92 mm)

All inner walls of the house should be scratched or scored to provide clinging surfaces or nylon screen stapled from top to bottom inside of the box.

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