

Gardening in the Zone[®]

with Iowa Gardening Magazine's Liz Gilman



Jim Pease (aka ISU Batman)

Bats in your Belfry

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Are some unwelcomed visitors driving you batty? If so, then read on because this week I interviewed Jim Pease, wildlife specialist with Iowa State University (ISU) Extension, about bats.

According to Pease, bats are amazing creatures and are extremely valuable for insect control. Each bat can devour hundreds of flying insects each night. So if you're like me, we like them for that reason. But the problem becomes when they invade our living spaces.

If you find a bat in your home, Pease suggests opening up the front door or a window and let it follow the air currents out. Then you need to locate and close up entrance holes to prevent the bat and others from re-colonizing in your house. But first you need to understand some bat habits to be successful.

First, bats are nocturnal. They emerge from their roosts at dusk each evening and search for food and water. So this means that if you want to block their entrances, you need to do this after dusk. If you block their entrance during the day, that's when they'll search for a way out and come down through your walls and scare you. Or worse, they'll die a slow and painful death which you don't wish on any animal. Second, bats follow air currents so blocking any air currents connected to cracks or holes will be key.

To do this, you need to go out around sundown and watch for emerging bats. Check around the chimney, gable vents, roof vents, under the eaves, behind the rain gutter and under torn shingles. Once you find the entrance, you need to install a temporary one-way door so the bats can get out, but not back in. You can create this by duct-taping a half-inch mesh bird netting or screen wire over the hole in the upper half of the netting. Then tape the top and two sides and leave the bottom edge open and just loose enough for the bats to squeeze out. That evening they will hit the screen and then crawl around until they find the bottom and fly out. When they return, they will be drawn to where the air current is and not the bottom of the screen so they won't be able to get back in. If you leave this up for 2-4 days, you can be assured that all the bats are out and the repairs can be made to seal up the entrance permanently.

This concludes the growing season and our newspaper column for the year. We hope you found our tips helpful and you'll log on to www.iowagardeningmagazine.com or www.extension.iastate.edu for more gardening information. Have a good winter!