

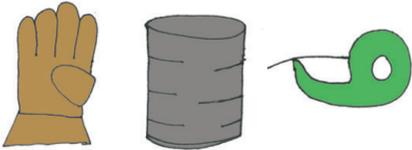
When bats ATTACK



Illustration by Jennifer Crawford

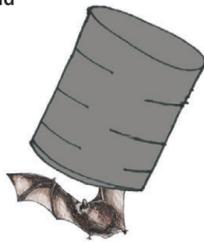
How to Capture a Bat

CAUTION: If a bat is present in your home and you cannot rule out the possibility of exposure, leave the bat alone and contact an animal-control or public health agency for assistance. If professional help is unavailable, use precautions to capture the bat safely.

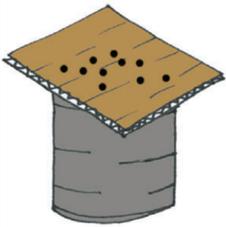


TOOLS: Leather work gloves, coffee can, piece of cardboard and tape

STEP 1: When the bat lands, approach it slowly while wearing the gloves and place the box over it.



STEP 2: Slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard to the container securely.



STEP 3: Punch small holes in the cardboard, allowing the bat to breathe.

STEP 4: Contact your health department or animal-control authority to make arrangements for rabies testing.

If you see a bat in your home, and you are sure no human or pet exposure has occurred, confine the bat to a room by closing all doors and windows leading out of the room except those to the outside. The bat will probably leave soon. If not, it can be caught, as described, and released outdoors away from people and pets.

Source: www.cdc.gov
Design by Lindsay Koski/Index



Bats in the home lead to hospital trips and elaborate methods of expulsion

Bats are a pain in my butt — literally.

Seeing my 100-year-old house as a bat hotel, the flying rodents invaded. I battled dozens of bats in a matter of weeks. They won. I learned that although they can't turn people into vampires, they can carry dangerous diseases like rabies and should be taken seriously. You'll need a shot in the rear, or even your life could be on the line.

"We don't hear a lot about rabies anymore," said Stewart Blessing, an environmental public health specialist for the Adair County Health Department. "But there's a reason for that."

Blessing said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has strict guidelines about human exposure to rabies, especially from bats.

"If you wake up with a bat in your room, we consider that an exposure [to rabies]," Blessing said. "I don't want to alarm anyone, but bat bites can be small and go undetected."

Exposure means treatment, and treatment means needles.

"We don't take a risk," said Gail McCurdy, an epidemiology specialist for the ACHD. "The shots are better than the alternative."

I agree. A quick prick in the butt beats death any day. But in my ignorance, bats were merely an inconvenience.

My fight with the creepy critters began simply enough. Senior Jennifer Crawford, my summer sublessee, sent me an e-mail.

"There was a bat here the other night," she wrote. "I just shut the door and hoped it wouldn't crawl under the door."

I thought nothing of it, but then Crawford sent another e-mail. The bats were back — kamikaze diving into box fans and toilets and invading my ceiling.

"I could hear their little feet or teeth or something, and I was pretty sure a chirpy little head was about to bust through," Crawford wrote. "I think it died up there, and we're going to start smelling it soon."

Safely at home, hundreds of miles from the flying rodents, I had little sympathy.

"That bat could have been the next Batman," I wrote back in an e-mail. "You just robbed the world of a superhero, jerk."

A week later, I moved back into my apartment. My first night, a single bat raided my home. I slept peacefully on my couch (Crawford hadn't moved out of my bedroom yet) until my courteous sublessee awoke me with a piercing scream screamed directly into my ear.

"There's a bat," she screamed.



John Priest

Groggily, I forced my eyelids open, and I could see the bat's dark silhouette circling overhead. Having driven six hours that day, I was too tired to care. My eyes fell closed but not for long. The silhouette dove toward the tall, blonde frame of my already bat-weary friend. Another scream.

I opened my eyes as Crawford stopped, dropped and rolled. Stiffling laughter, I told her to shut up and go to sleep. It was a bat. What harm could it do?

Disappointed in my distance and nonchalance, Crawford retreated to her bedroom. As the bat continued circling overhead, I drifted to sleep, and the flying fuzz ball had left by morning.

But the bats were back the next night. And the next. And the next.

These creepy critters had no respect for my need for beauty sleep. Every night, moments after I closed my eyes and began cuddling with my pillow, the bats would attack, emerging from the darkness like demons with a vendetta. Not just one or two. At least three and sometimes five of the beasts would wiggle their way through the cracks in the house to party it up in my apartment.

Eviction became the name of the game. Using the method devised by Crawford, I waited until the bats landed before trapping them in empty cereal boxes. Then I launched the thrashing creatures outside and went back to bed.

We had a system. It wasn't a good system, but it was a system.

Crawford finally moved out, and I tried to resume my Truman routines, but my bat friends made that impossible. My roommate, a man's man with a paralyzing fear of bats, refused to sleep in our apartment until we solved the bat problem.

Friends and family recommended extermination, but I couldn't imagine hurting the bats.

Finally, I called my landlord. Armed with newspapers and duct tape, he found holes in the house and stuffed them. Ripping tape like

Fast Facts about Bats

Rabies: A viral infection of the central nervous system that is easily prevented by vaccination.

17 of 19 naturally acquired cases of rabies in humans in the U.S. from 1997-2006 were associated with bats.

One to two humans contract rabies each year.

Bat Knowledge Quiz True or False?

1. Bats are blind
2. Bats are rodents
3. Bats suck human blood
4. Most bats have rabies
5. Bats play key roles in ecosystems

Source: www.cdc.gov

1. False 2. False 3. False 4. False 5. True

a madman, he worked for hours building a sticky gray barrier between me and the bats.

That night, calmed by my landlord's master taping skills, I fell sound asleep.

A soft scratching in my ceiling woke me, and, like Jennifer, I thought I would soon see a chirpy little head bust through. But, I checked the tiles in my drop ceiling — all secure. I went back to snoring.

The next thing I know, blurry brown blobs were dive-bombing my face.

I jumped out of bed, and the bats followed me. Slamming my bedroom door in their smug little faces, I grabbed a cereal box and a trash bag. This was war.

Four hours later, my apartment was bat-free. With a montage of bats playing through my brain like an Alfred Hitchcock horror film, I spent the day researching my enemy.

"Rabies is not transmitted through the air, blood, urine or feces, but possible contact with saliva is serious," said a CDC Hotline representative, whose mechanical, monotone voice convinced me that I was talking with a computer. "You should talk to a doctor or local health department immediately."

So I called every medical expert I could think of — my mom, local doctors, the hospital, the ACHD, local pharmacies, the Student Health Center and my insurance company. About 300 cell phone minutes

later, they all told me the same thing. "Better safe than sorry. Get your shots."

About 12 hours after the vicious vampires attacked me, I walked into the Northeast Regional Medical Center to get the first of many shots. "Drop your drawers and bend over, sir," the nice nurse with the big smile (and the bigger needle) said.

As I stood with my white cheeks broadcast to the nursing staff behind me, I immediately regretted not ripping the head off every bat I had so peacefully released. A piercing pain spread through the lower half of my body as the needle punctured my flesh.

The bats had to die. I called my landlord again, and he found Curvin Martin, a man from Memphis, Mo., who promised to solve the bat problem.

"There are a lot of houses full of cracks and crevices," Martin said. "Any crack where you could slip a book of matches through is big enough for a bat to make a visit."

Since Martin worked his magic, I haven't seen a single bat in my apartment.

"I don't kill them or catch them," Martin said. "I just make sure they leave and don't come back. But they're going to live somewhere."

Four weeks have passed, and I had my final rabies shot yesterday. I just hope that my bats' new neighborhood is closer to your house than mine.

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