



MAMMALS



On Foxes

There is a common misbelief that foxes eat pets. Foxes are usually TOO SMALL to attack an adult cat, let alone a dog.

Cats should be kept inside anyway, because they can kill songbirds and small mammals. Knowing your pets are safe, you can enjoy fox visits in your backyard! Foxes are omnivores and can live in a variety of habitats, even near humans.

Some other interesting facts about foxes:

Watching foxes in your yard (and if you're lucky, fox kits) is one of the most incredible experiences you will have in your yard. To attract more foxes, plant more native shrubs for them to hide in, put out small amounts of bait (mealworms, cheese, eggs, meat, etc.), but not too much so the fox doesn't become dependent on you, and cut wire fencing around your house (if you have any) so that the fox can get in and out. We have a neighborhood fox who comes into our yard often (who marked our backyard with his urine). We hope he makes a den there.

During the nesting season (late winter), they might wake you up at night with their high-pitched alarm calls that sound like someone in pain. Don't be scared: that is an important fox behavior and isn't at all harmful. If you live in a rural area, you might also be woken by other eerie and even stranger sounds. Those are coyotes; they are majestic animals and are not to be feared.



On Squirrels

There are three main categories of squirrels: tree squirrels, flying squirrels, and ground squirrels. Tree squirrels (such as the common Eastern gray squirrel and the rarer red squirrel) are cute, rather annoying, and very fun to watch. They are plentiful and do not need much helping, but if you wanted, you could purchase a squirrel feeder or scatter nuts around your yard to watch them.

The second category of squirrels, flying squirrels, are strictly nocturnal. Since they usually come in the middle of the night, gliding elusively between tree branches, you might never know if they are there, but they aren't that rare.

You can leave out nuts or birdseed at dusk for them (a platform would be best so other nighttime animals don't eat them) or purchase a nesting box to attract these amazing critters.

The groundhog (also called woodchuck) and the Eastern chipmunk are the most common ground squirrels in the Eastern U.S., but in the west there are more species, such as marmots, California ground squirrels, and prairie dogs. To encourage more ground squirrels to your yard, mow your lawn less frequently because these animals like long grass. Never use pesticides. If you don't have an outdoor pet, you can dig a hole under your fence or, if you have a wire fence, cut some sections of it, to let them cross from yard to yard. This is also great for other mammals, such as foxes, rabbits, opossums, and raccoons. And chipmunks LOVE peanuts! In our backyard, they have hidden peanuts in little holes all over!



Activity #1: Planting native shrubs

Many small mammals such as rabbits, chipmunks, and opossums like shrubs that they can hide in. Shrubs are also host plants for many caterpillar species and provide important fruits for lots of beautiful songbirds, such as waxwings, grosbeaks, tanagers, bluebirds, catbirds, and robins. Generally, native shrubs are better and serve more species. Here are some example shrubs that you can plant in your garden (native to the Eastern U.S.).

Shrubs		
Plant name	Height (feet)	Sun conditions
Winterberry (<i>Ilex verticillata</i>)	6 - 15'	Partial shade
Witch hazel (<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i>)	15 - 25'	Full sun
Serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier</i> species)	10 - 25'	Partial shade
Elderberry (<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>)	7 - 18'	Full sun to partial shade
Staghorn sumac (<i>Rhus typhina</i>)	8 - 25'	Full sun to partial shade
Great rhododendron (<i>rhododendron maximum</i>)	5 - 15'	Partial shade
Mountain laurel (<i>Kalmia latifolia</i>)	6 - 15'	Partial shade <input type="checkbox"/>

Virginia opossums will thank you for the shrubs you put in. They are the only marsupials found north of Mexico and they love to hide. They play dead to protect themselves from predators, emitting a putrid odor, although they cannot control when they do this. You can also offer them apples at night (they love them!).



On Bats



ECHOLOLOCATION:

Most bats use echolocation to detect food and experience the world around them: they emit high-frequency sounds and then listen to the echo, which tells them the shape, size, and texture of the object or animal. Fruit bats are larger and do not use echolocation.

THREATS:

There are many threats to bats, and lots of species (such as the once common little brown bat) are endangered or threatened. An invasive fungus has spread across North America and causes a dangerous disease known as white-nose syndrome in bats that, to say the least, is causing devastating population declines in almost every North American bat species. Scientists are researching treatments, but it may be too late for many bats. It is important to provide nesting sites for bats in your backyard. They will also eat lots of annoying insects, fixing your summer bug problem.

DIET:

Most bats eat insects. Big brown bats, one of the most common bats in the Eastern U.S., eat lots of beetles. The threatened little brown bat eats flying insects, including moths and mosquitoes.

OTHER INTERESTING FACTS:

Bats make up roughly 20% of all mammal species. There are many species of bats, but the most common bat in the Eastern U.S. is the big brown bat.

Activity #2: Install a bat box



The best way to attract bats to your yard is to install a bat box for bats to sleep and hibernate in. The box should be at least 10 feet off the ground (12–20 feet is better) and be hung on a pole or on the side of a wooden building at least 20 feet from the nearest trees.

There are many different types of bat boxes – BestNest has some higher-quality ones that can hold more bats. Leaving dead trees in your yard is also important for providing natural nesting locations for bats. You could also build your own with the guide linked here. Bats eat lots of moths; you could also plant a night garden with evening primrose, morning glory, thistles, and other plants to attract moths.

