



City of Cleveland
Division of Animal Care & Control Services
9203 Detroit Ave., Cleveland, OH 44102
216-664-3069

COEXISTING WITH WILDLIFE

In recent decades, our cities and suburbs have grown and taken over rural areas. Many wild species take advantage of the conditions we have created for them. **A common misconception is that getting rid of the animals will get rid of the problem.** The reality is that removing animals invites more in to fill the empty space. Many wild species also provide benefits to humans and pets such as eating ticks, mosquitos, and other pests which carry disease.

As an alternative to impounding and destroying healthy and treatable wildlife, the National Animal Control Association recommends animal control provide education on wild animals in the area as well as effective and humane methods to deter and exclude animals from homes, structures and targeted areas. **These methods on the most common urban species in our area are outlined in the following pages.**

Any injured wild animal should be reported to 216-664-3069. Any complaints about vacant properties that are attracting wildlife should be directed to Building & Housing at 216-664-2007 or the Mayor's Action Center at 216-664-2900.

Information on additional species can be found at <https://www.humanesociety.org/wildlife-management-solutions>

Here are some general methods to prevent most wildlife conflicts. See species-specific information for additional tips:

- Make sure trash can lids are secure. Use a bungee or weights to secure lids if needed. If possible, keep trash cans in a secured area, such as a closed garage or shed, until garbage day.
- Do not leave pet food outside – if you feed outside, remove food after your pet is done eating.
- Outbuildings, like garages and sheds that may create a denning area, should be kept closed.
- Do NOT feed wildlife. If you choose to feed songbirds, place a feeder with a gravity-operated treadle that is inaccessible to other wildlife species. Clean up spilled bird food.
- Trim tree branches that overhang the house.
- Fix any holes or openings that allow access to attics, porches, basements, garages or sheds.
- Do not leave pets alone outside unattended.
- Note: Unless a wild animal is showing abnormal behaviors, it is not necessarily cause for alarm to see them out during the day, even if they are a nocturnal species.

Please note:

It is illegal to poison, torture, deprive an animal of necessary sustenance, unnecessarily or cruelly beat, needlessly mutilate or kill, or impound or confine an animal without supplying it during confinement with a sufficient quantity of good wholesome food and water. It is also illegal to impound or confine an animal without affording it, during such confinement, access to shelter from heat, cold, wind, rain, snow or excessive direct sunlight if it can reasonably be expected that the animal would otherwise become sick or in some way other way suffer. (Cleveland, Ohio Code of Ordinances: 603.08, 603.09)

The City of Cleveland Division of Animal Care & Control offers 'nuisance' wildlife (skunks, groundhogs, opossums, and raccoons) trapping from May 1 through October 31. **These animals are euthanized and disposed of if removed from your property.** Please call us at 216.664.3069 for information on our trapping services.

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OPOSSUMS

Opossums are gentle creatures by nature and are not disease ridden. They keep good personal hygiene, cleaning themselves and their coats like cats. They almost never carry the rabies virus, as their internal body temperatures are too low to support the virus' growth.

COMMON CONFLICTS & SOLUTIONS

Tolerance

Opossum are not aggressive: their open-mouth, defensive hissing is merely a bluff to look vicious. And if that doesn't work they play dead when really scared!

If there is an opossum in the backyard, don't worry, and just leave him be. They aren't a threat, and more than likely they will be moving on in a short while. The best way to keep them from visiting is to have tight-fitting lids on garbage cans, not to leave any pet food outside overnight and to remember to pick up any fruit that has fallen from trees.

But far from being a nuisance, opossums can be beneficial for your garden, eating snails, slugs, insects and sometimes even small rodents. They'll even clean up spilled garbage and fruit that has fallen off trees.

Denning

The best way to keep opossums from denning under a deck or patio is to make sure they cannot get there in the first place by keeping any holes filled.

If you suspect a mother opossum has already moved in, wait until she leaves her den (two hours after dark is generally a safe time). Then, loosely close the opening with netting, straw or other fibrous material. This will ensure that an animal trapped inside can clear the path to escape, but one outside will not disturb the blockage to get back in.

Opossum moms take their kids wherever they go, so there is not much chance that any babies will be left behind. But always check for youngsters before closing the opening. If the hole has not been disturbed for two or three nights, it's safe to assume that no one is inside and the hole can be properly filled. For permanent exclusion we recommend putting in an "L" footer.

RACCOONS

If you see a raccoon in your yard during the day, don't panic—she is not necessarily sick or dangerous. It's perfectly normal for raccoons to be active throughout the day. She may merely be foraging longer hours to support her young, visiting a garden while the dogs are indoors, or moving to a new location. Observe the behavior of the raccoon before calling for assistance.

It isn't uncommon for a healthy raccoon to be active in the daytime, but it's highly unusual for a raccoon to be aggressive toward a person. A female may boldly defend her young, arching her back and growling or giving a loud "whoof," and perhaps lunging at a person she deems threatening. Only very rarely will a raccoon chase after someone seen as threatening.

A raccoon who appears ill or disoriented, or who engages in unprovoked aggression, may be rabid or infected with canine distemper or feline parvovirus.

COMMON CONFLICTS & SOLUTIONS

Yards

Raccoons can damage lawns (especially recently sodded ones) by digging for earthworms and grubs. Often they simply reach under the strips and feel around for their meal, pulling out the grubs and worms without causing any damage, but sometimes they'll tear up the sod. This is generally a short-term problem that lasts only as long as the watering does.

Solutions

On small areas, try a hot sauce (capsaicin) repellent. On larger areas, a band of repellent can be applied around the perimeter, lights can be left on to confuse the raccoons or tip you off to their presence and a scaring device such as a sprinkler can be set up to frighten any approaching raccoons.

Gardens

The key here is to act quickly: Step in at the first sign of raccoon damage, because one taste probably won't be enough. Raccoons like both fruits and vegetables; among their favorites are grapes and corn. They often forage just before your crops are ready to be picked, so pay extra attention just before harvesting the crop.

Solutions

Set up a battery-operated radio by your crops, tuned to an all-night talk show and turn it on for a few nights. Or, set up single-strand electric fencing around areas where damage is frequent.

Trash

When raccoons get into the trash it's not a raccoon problem; it's a trash problem.

Solutions

- Purchase trashcans made to keep wildlife from getting inside.
- Secure the lids with bungee cords, rope tie-downs or weights.
- Take cans to the curb on the day on the day of trash pick-up rather than the night before.
- Keep cans inside a shed or garage, freeze smelly food items such as fish between pick-ups.

SKUNKS

Occasional skunk sightings in a neighborhood are not a cause for alarm. Skunks are generally easy-going and may benefit humans by eating insects and rodents. Even though skunks are mostly active at night, they sometimes look for food by day. Don't be concerned if you see an adult skunk in the daytime unless they are also showing abnormal behaviors, such as: limb paralysis, circling, boldness or unprovoked aggression, disorientation or uncharacteristic tameness.

COMMON CONFLICTS & SOLUTIONS

Because of the lingering odor, and fear of being sprayed, it may be hard for some people to tolerate skunks living under a deck or shed. But skunks need shelter when they are most vulnerable (during the coldest parts of the winter and when raising young). However, skunks can be left alone and will readily move on their own accord, or you can safely encourage them to leave an area where they are not wanted.

Skunks use their powerful defense only when they or their young are threatened and cannot escape. Even then, they give warning — stamping front feet, a raised tail, hissing, short forward charges and twisting their hind end around in your direction. Move away slowly and quietly. Dogs tend to ignore these warnings, so it is important they be restrained.

Denning

Any suspected skunk den should first be checked to determine if it has residents by loosely filling the hole(s) with soil, leaves, straw, crumpled paper or similar material. If a skunk is present, the animal will easily push their way out overnight and reopen the hole. If the plug remains undisturbed for 2-3 nights, it is safe to assume that the hole is unoccupied and can be filled. In the winter, you may need to give a little more time before blocking the entrance. Permanently exclude den-seeking creatures with an L-shaped footer of welded wire or similar barriers.

If a skunk is using the den, either harassment or eviction using a one-way door system is recommended. When evicting skunks, be sure that dependent young are not present. When in doubt, assume they are and use the door only after they start following their mother to forage. Leave the door in place 2-3 nights to a week to be sure the skunk has left.

Skunks who have wandered into a garage can simply be allowed to wander back out by making sure the door is open before dusk. Skunks are nocturnally active, so opening the door at dusk and closing it later in the evening is likely to be a solution to this problem. It is important to make sure the skunk has not established a den and given birth, and that any accessible foods (bags of bird seed, etc.) have been moved and secured in tightly sealed containers.

Harassment

When it is safe to displace skunks, mild harassment can be very effective. This can be as simple as loosely repacking the den hole with leaves, straw, etc. to see if the skunk gets the message and moves elsewhere. If they require more persuading, adding light and noise to make a dark and quiet denning space unattractive may help as well. Make sure the skunk is not close by before setting up the disturbances.

Repellants

Mild repellents, such as used kitty litter, can be placed near or inside the den to one side so the skunk has to pass them to get out; commercial or homemade capsaicin or castor oil repellents may also be tried — stronger “hot sauces” are often unnecessary and must be treated with extreme care if used. Avoid buying skunk deterrents that are based on predator urine — these products are created under inhumane conditions, and are not necessary to repel skunks effectively.

WOODCHUCKS (aka groundhogs)

To some, woodchucks may be simply "vermin," animals that are of no known service to humans. Just the possibility that woodchucks might cause problems one day is used as an excuse to "control" them.

Woodchucks have their own place in the ecosystem and should be accepted for that alone. Woodchucks occasionally eat garden crops and can cause considerable damage in a short period, but people and woodchucks can coexist for years without conflict. If you have a woodchuck burrow on your property and don't have any conflicts with its occupancy, you can let it be.

Woodchucks are not considered to be a significant source of any infectious disease that can be transmitted to humans. However, they can get rabies, so unprovoked attacks by woodchucks must be treated seriously as potential rabies exposures.

COMMON CONFLICTS & SOLUTIONS

Evicting and Timing

Where woodchuck burrows are deemed to be problems, eviction and exclusion are the recommended courses of action. There are no commercial repellents registered for use on woodchucks.

Before attempting to evict and exclude woodchucks, consider that mother woodchucks have dependent young in their burrows from late winter until spring or early summer, and late in the year woodchucks are preparing to hibernate. Evicting them during this time can be inhumane. The best time to evict woodchucks from burrows is from mid- to late summer, or between early July and late September in most areas. If you watch closely, you may actually see the young woodchucks as they first venture above-ground. If you do, you can begin your eviction about three weeks later with relative assurance that it will avoid affecting dependent offspring.

Closing burrows

First, test for activity: Loosely plug all of the burrow entrances with grass clippings, newspaper, or similar material and monitor activity to determine if the burrow is currently vacant. If, after 3-5 days in clear summer weather, the material has not been disturbed, you can assume the burrow is unoccupied. Use heavy-gauge, welded fencing wire (with no larger than three-inch squares) to close burrows:

- Cut the wire into three-by-three foot sections.
- Center a section over each burrow entrance.
- Bury the fencing at least one foot deep.
- Pin it down if necessary with landscape staples.

Harassment

If the burrow system is occupied, harass the residents:

- Partially dig the entrance out.
- Clear vegetation away from entrances.
- Put some harmless but strong-smelling substance just inside the entrance (such as used clumps of kitty litter).
- Loosely seal the entrance, so the smell stays inside the burrow.

Monitor the closed burrow every few days to make sure it's not still occupied; when it is clear that the burrow is empty, you can permanently seal it.

Keep monitoring not only closed burrows but the rest of the yard, too. Immediately responding to any attempts to reopen old burrows or establish new ones is vital to preventing new burrows from popping up.

Fencing

Even though woodchucks are good climbers, you can protect your gardens with fencing. Fences work best when protecting relatively small areas. To be a successful barrier, a perimeter garden fence should at minimum:

- Be made of a chicken or welded wire with mesh size no bigger than three by three inches.
- Reach three to four feet above ground level.
- Have twelve to eighteen inches of unsecured fencing at the top so it wobbles as the woodchuck tries to climb it.
- Have an L-footer base that is buried or pinned to the ground or a single strand of electric fencing four inches off the ground and six inches in front (to prevent digging).

If you are building a more rigid fence, bend the top ten to fifteen inches outward at a 45-degree angle to create a barrier to help prevent climbing. Electric fences will work as well, and often a simple single strand of electrified wire set four inches above the ground is enough to discourage visits. If not, you can add one more strand about nine inches from the ground. (Follow standard safety protocols when using electric fences.)

Scare devices

Woodchucks are cautious animals and can be frightened by new objects in the environment:

- Tie a silver Mylar® helium balloons (look for them at the local party store) in the garden on a short line, so the wind occasionally bounces them onto the ground.
- You can also suspend a beach ball in a place where it will catch the wind.

These scare devices may keep them away temporarily, but are more likely to work if they are changed frequently.

Habitat modification

Woodchucks like to navigate through fairly high vegetation.

Removing vegetation around burrows can create insecurity and, with other eviction methods applied simultaneously, can encourage them to abandon a burrow system. Beyond that, keeping undergrowth and grass cover low may deny woodchucks the security they seek before burrowing around buildings and residences.

During the course of the year, woodchucks routinely move between burrow systems. Frequently a burrow is abandoned or unoccupied for weeks, or even months, before it is reopened.

Keeping woodchucks from returning to abandoned burrows

Even when a burrow's entrance is barely recognizable, the woodchuck's highly developed sense of smell allows them to locate places where others have lived months or even years before.

With only a few minutes' work, woodchucks can reopen a tunnel system and use it again. You can prevent this by burying a three-foot-square panel of welded wire, centered over the entrance hole before an abandoned burrow is rediscovered.