

## Squirrels

- **Find entry points around the home.**

They might be cute and fuzzy, but when squirrels are in the attic or walls of a home, serious harm and injury can occur. Squirrels can cause damage to your house in places that are very difficult to reach, meaning lengthy and costly repairs.

- **Seal up all entry points except one.**

Squirrels can squeeze through just about any opening in your home. Make sure doors and windows are properly fitted to your house and covered with fitted screens. Wire mesh can be placed over open vents and chimney tops (or you can invest in a chimney cap). Seal up other openings with caulk, steel wool or appropriate materials as needed (e.g., fill up holes with dirt, use bricks to fix a wall, etc.).



- **Give the squirrels some incentive to leave.**

Drive the squirrels out as soon as they make themselves known, before they can give birth or set up shop. Playing loud music and keeping lights on can be effective as a squirrel repellent. Trim any trees that overhang your house, as squirrels and other pests can gain easy access to your roof, windows and attic.

- **Learn how to get rid of squirrels in the attic with traps.**

Traps are a very effective weapon in the war against squirrels in the attic. There are a few different types of squirrel traps that you can use, as well as a few different places to set them.

- 1) Live-capture traps do just what their name sounds like: captures the squirrel alive. Unfortunately, you will still have to deal with the live animal after trapping, either through euthanasia or setting it free 5 or 10 miles from your home.
- 2) Kill-traps are actually more humane than live traps and much safer, since the rodent will be taken out of the equation quickly and safely.
- 3) A third type of trap is called a "body-gripping" trap and can be placed directly outside of entry points to catch the squirrel as it darts in and out of your home.
- 4) Box traps can also be placed outside in the yard, near burrows, to capture squirrels before they can enter your home.

## Opossums

Opossums break into your house by finding a small hole and chewing around it until it's big enough for them to slip through. Garages, attics and underneath porches are their favorite hangouts. If you've ever had an opossum in the attic, you know they can shred the insulation, chew on wires and even die, leaving a stinky and hazardous mess.



Here are step-by-step instructions to remove opossums outside and in the attic.

- **Step-by-Step Instructions if OUTSIDE**

- 1) Purchase large cage traps rated raccoon size, usually about 10" x 12" x 30".
- 2) Set traps and bait with marshmallows, or, if stray cats are not a problem in the area, cat food works as well. Make sure traps are scent-free and flush to the ground, and set in the shade.
- 3) Relocate any trapped opossum at least 10 miles from capture site.
- 4) If you have opossums living under a deck, shed, or other structure, install an exclusion barrier of steel mesh around the perimeter, and down at least 12" into the ground, with bottom of mesh sloping outward.

- **Step-by-Step Instructions if IN THE ATTIC**

- 1) Inspect house to find out how they are getting inside. Likely somewhere on the roof or eaves.
- 2) You can actually set traps inside the attic; however, you must check them frequently and be sure you are able to remove the cage from the attic with the live opossum. It might be better to set traps outside, on the roof near the entry hole.
- 3) If you've trapped a opossum, it might have young clinging to it. Relocate them all together, at least 10 miles from capture site.
- 4) Repair the entry hole and clean and decontaminate the opossum feces out of the attic.

- **Pest-Proof Entry to Your Home**

- 1) Walk around the home and property to shore up areas that provide easy entry to opossums. Look for holes in the siding of your home, garage, shed or other structures.
- 2) Examine the eaves and under hangs of your roof as well for areas that may need maintenance to prevent opossums from forcing their way into your home and structures.

- **REMOVE FOOD SOURCES**

Opossums are attracted to food. By removing food sources, the property will be a lot less inviting.

- 1) Never intentionally leave food out for them and keep garbage cans tightly closed.
- 2) Clean barbecue grills and grease traps after each use.
- 3) Avoid putting out birdseed.
- 4) Pick up fruit that drops from plants or trees
- 5) Feed your pets indoors. If this isn't feasible, feed your pets in the middle of the day.
- 6) Opossums usually become active after the sun goes down.

- **SCARE OFF PESTS**

Motion-activated lights or sprinklers along the perimeter of your home and around fruit trees may frighten opossums. The smell of a potential predator can be a deterrent as well.

## Skunks



- **Behavior**

- 1) Skunks are nocturnal animals, going in search of food primarily at night. During the day, they use dens as safe havens. They can be beneficial near lawns and gardens because they feed on damaging insects and grubs, snakes and rats. However, their habit of digging can make them unwelcome pests.
- 2) Female skunks build burrows to give birth in and raise their young. These young are referred to as kits. The young follow and hunt with their mother beginning at 2 or 3 months of age, although they will continue to stay with their mother until they are about a year old.

- **Behavior – Continued**

- 3) Skunks have the ability to produce an odor that wards off predators for a 15-foot target radius. The smell is produced from glands on either side of their anal region. It contains sulfur and other ingredients that, in some, can cause temporary blindness. These animals are common carriers of rabies, in addition to histoplasmosis, mastitis and canine distemper. They typically only transfer rabies to other animals. Transmission occurs only through saliva and does not occur when they spray. Most diseases they carry cannot be directly transmitted to humans.

- **Habitats**

Skunks are not social animals and prefer to keep to themselves, although females may choose to stay together in cold weather in order to share warmth. They acquire dens built by other animals or build their own, and use these dens throughout all seasons to sleep and take shelter from the cold. If given the opportunity, they will take shelter under raised porches and patios or in crawl spaces, in addition to mobile homes and buildings.

Skunks can sometimes be located by following faint odors that may be detected in areas where they have fed or traveled through. They may also leave track marks, droppings or holes where they have dug for food. These holes are about 1 to 3 inches in length and are similar to squirrel holes. Typically, many holes will occur within the same few square yards.

Skunk dens are slight depressions located in areas where there is no grass, often near wooden structures like sheds, porches or patios. Two-inch long hairs may be found just outside the entrance and there should be a noticeable stench.

- **How to Keep Skunks Away**

The risks associated with capturing and moving skunks should be left to a professional. Some states have laws protecting skunks, so contact your local Fish and Wildlife office before attempting to trap or poison a skunk. Keeping skunks away and deterring them from property is your best strategy for avoiding a smelly situation. The best way to control the skunk population around your home is with habitat modification.

- 1) **Patch holes around your foundation.** Skunks are great diggers. If you're using fencing or mesh to close off certain areas, bury the material at least one and a half to two feet down. It's important to make sure skunks are outside before you seal up access points, or you may end up with animals trapped under or inside your house.
- 2) **Eliminate possible den sites.** Removing wood and rock piles from porches and patios and clearing away debris around the home helps reduce sites for skunks to establish a den. Skunks have even been known to camp out in junked cars.
- 3) **Get rid of bugs and rodents.** These are favorite foods among skunks. If a skunk's food source disappears, it may move on.
- 4) **Feed your pets inside.** Skunks love dog and cat food. They also enjoy feeding on the roaches and other bugs that pet food attracts. If you have outdoor pets, feed them during the day, and then remove any uneaten food before evening, when skunks are most active.
- 5) **Store bird and pet food in outdoor storage building or in your garage.** Ensure these items are kept in sealed containers in hard to access places to prevent an easy meal for skunks.
- 6) **Disturb the peace.** If you do locate a skunk's den, keep up a campaign of gentle harassment by covering up the opening with leaves or straw.
- 7) **Don't rely on natural skunk repellents.** Most aren't considered particularly effective. Applications of citrus oils, castor oil or predator urine have had limited degrees of success. Cayenne pepper and other hot pepper solutions may or may not be effective and pose a threat to children and pets who come into contact with them.
- 8) **Use ammonia-soaked rags or mothballs (naphthalene) in skunk hangouts.** The harsh smell of ammonia and/or mothballs has been known to scare away skunks. Though they don't

offer a permanent solution and will have to be reapplied as the smell of the chemicals fades, they do help in the short-term. Like other types of repellents, they could pose a threat to children and pets.

- 9) **Bright yard lights and loud noises.** Although they have proven to have a greater potential to annoy neighbors than to scare off wildlife, arranging lights and noise machines around your property can keep skunks away. Remember, porch lights can attract insects, the main staple of the skunks' diet and terrible nuisance if you're trying to spend time outdoors at night.
- 10) **Reduce access to food, water, and shelter.** To reduce food sources, fallen fruit and spilled seed from bird feeders should be removed frequently.
- 11) **Garbage cans should have tight-fitting lids.** Food items or table scraps should not be placed in compost bins; use "hot" rather than "cold" compost method to process organic waste. Food placed outdoors for pets should be removed by nightfall. Skunks aren't good climbers, so keeping garbage can openings sealed and off the ground are great deterrents.
- 12) **Never intentionally feed a wild skunk.** Even when done with good intentions, is a harmful practice. The skunk or its young may become dependent on the unnatural food source and lose their fear of people. This increases the chance that an adult or child may be bitten. Also, the skunk may be trapped or killed when it wanders into another yard where it is not welcome.
- 13) **Management of grubs and other insects.** Removal of grubs and other insects in lawns can reduce food for skunks. In theory, this will deter the animal from further digging.
- 14) **Potential den sites can be limited.** Cutting back overgrown shrubbery and by stacking firewood tightly, preferably at least 18 inches above the ground. Remove boards, rocks, and debris lying on the ground, as insects that skunks feed on hide under these objects. Also, control mice and rats so that their numbers do not build up and provide an abundant food source for skunks.

If these habitat modifications don't work, wildlife traps might be necessary to get rid of skunks. This is best left to a pest management professional due to the danger's skunks present.

In urban areas, live trapping with baited box or cage traps is the most desirable method. Cage traps are available from feed or hardware stores. Almost any type of food can be used as bait to catch skunks, although there is less chance of catching a small dog or cat if fruits such as apples, pears or bananas are used.

Skunks rarely release their scent in darkened areas such as live traps that have been carefully covered with plywood or burlap. Leave the door uncovered to identify the animal before the trap is moved. Always approach a trap slowly and quietly to prevent upsetting a trapped skunk. Shooting and trapping, including the use of live traps and leg hold traps, are some methods that can be used in rural areas."

Skunk removal is always best left to the professionals, but if you're going to try it, make sure you're armed with the proper knowledge.

## Raccoons

There's more than one way to help rid yourself of a raccoon. While these black-masked bandits may have some public appeal, finding one raiding through your garbage is a less than appealing idea. However, due to their adaptable habits and willingness to eat – well, just about anything – keeping raccoons away can be a challenge.



- **Keeping Raccoons Out of Garden Areas**

Raccoons found in gardens are usually seeking out fruits and vegetables. If you discover raccoon damage to any of your plants, you should act fast. A tasty bite of fruit is enough to draw them back again and again. To prevent this from happening, consider installing a fence around the garden area. Sometimes, an electric fence may be required. Also recommended is playing a loop of a recorded talk show all night. Human voices are likely to scare the animals off.

- **Keeping Raccoons Out of Your Yard**

Are there small holes all over your lawn? These raccoons are probably looking to get some grub – literally. Raccoons often dig holes in the yard in search of grubs and other insects. Keeping raccoons out of your yard is more difficult, but not impossible. As nocturnal animals, most raccoons prefer to stay out of the spotlight. Bright lights that resemble daylight can scare raccoons away. Using a hot sauce repellent is suggested.

- **Keeping Raccoons Out of the Trash**

Dumpster diving is a popular practice among raccoons. Trash bins without secure lids might be one of the main reasons why raccoons have become attracted to your yard in the first place. To eliminate this problem, ensure that all garbage bins on the outside of your home have secure lids. You can use bungee cords to help keep lids in place.

## Bats



Bats are nocturnal mammals that feed primarily on plants (i.e., nectar, fruit), insects and spiders, so they can be considered beneficial for reducing some insect populations.

Most bat species are active at night and use echolocation to locate/capture food.

Bat roosts include locations such as caves, cavities in trees and, occasionally, human residences (e.g., attics, chimneys). In tropical climates, bats are active year-round. However, in temperate climates, bats can either migrate to warmer areas during colder months or go into hibernation.

- **Bats & Disease**

Bats should be excluded from homes due to the possibility of pathogens being transmitted to humans (either through bite or from aerosolized pathogens in droppings). In the United States, the rabies virus has been associated with animals such as raccoons (highest incidence), followed by bats, skunks,

foxes, cats, cattle and dogs. When a human is bitten by a rabid animal, that person may become infected with the rabies virus.

The rabies virus affects the central nervous system of victims and organs (e.g., skin, heart). After an incubation period of a few weeks to a few months (typically), the rabies virus infects the salivary glands of potential vectors and can be transmitted to victims via saliva at the bite site. There are post-bite rabies vaccines available for humans, and these therapies increase the chances of survival of a rabies virus infection.

Bats are also associated with other diseases, such as Marburg hemorrhagic fever, Ebola hemorrhagic fever, Nipah virus encephalitis, Nipah virus disease, histoplasmosis and diseases caused by coronaviruses and Lyssaviruses.

- **Keeping Bats Out of Buildings**

In some instances, bats may accidentally fly into homes where openings exist. In other cases, destruction of natural bat habitats due to land development may encourage bats to seek shelter elsewhere (e.g., human residences).

If you suspect you currently have a bat issue, your home should be inspected for possible bat entry points. Any openings larger than one-fourth inch by one-half inch should be sealed appropriately with caulk, screens, stainless steel wool or other methods. Chimneys can serve as an entry point for bats and can be capped, if necessary.

## Cats



Domestic cats, feral cats and homeless strays may wander into your yard or garden due to curiosity, mating, hunting, feeding, and establishing territory. Some may be looking for a new place to call home. Since cats have incredible climbing and jumping abilities, keeping them out of your outdoor area can be challenging.

Cats can be discouraged from digging in your garden beds or pussyfooting around your property by employing a few tactics or products. Be sure to change your tactics regularly. A new cat in the neighborhood might not be as sensitive to your usual methods, so regularly switching them can lead to more success.

- **Odor Barriers**

A cat's nose is highly sensitive to smell. You may be sensitive to the smell of cat urine in your yard since humans have 5 million odor receptors in your olfactory system. By comparison, a cat has 200 million odor receptors. If your yard or garden has smells that offend cats, you might have great success keeping them away.

Commercial cat repellents use the odor barrier method to discourage cats from entering an area. "Shake-Away" powder has the scent of predators that cats fear, namely, coyote, fox, and bobcat. This commercial cat repellent comes in a granular form, which you simply sprinkle around the problem area. The product is non-toxic and organic and will not harm your plants.

Some plants give off smells that cats dislike. One such plant, *Coleus canina*, goes by the common name “*scaredy-cat-plant*” is also useful if you want to keep your dog away from landscaping. Other plants recommended for keeping cats away from yards are rue and lavender (which is also a deer-resistant plant), and pennyroyal. Plant these between your other plants.

Cats reportedly don't like the smell of dried blood (found in blood meal fertilizer) or citrus. Use peels of oranges, lemons, limes, and grapefruit in your garden. Some people spread used coffee grounds or use mothballs, while others use eucalyptus or vinegar. You can also use cayenne pepper flakes, but it is not humane—it can sting and cause pain.

- **Physical Barriers**

- 1) Use physical barriers like chicken wire on top of your soil or mulch across the planting bed before you plant. Cats hate chicken wire or bristly material. Using wire cutters, you can cut holes in the chicken wire that are large enough for installing your plants.
- 2) For a mulching option, you can use sharp-edged pine cones, holly cuttings, eggshells, or stone mulch. Cats prefer to dig and poop in loose dirt and will be put off by these rough materials. For other areas, you might use a plastic carpet runner with the nub side up to discourage cats from perching or lounging.
- 3) Electric wire fence might seem like an extreme option, but try a humane version that keeps rabbits out of gardens.

- **Water Repellent**

Water is another type of physical barrier that is like kryptonite for cats. When you catch cats in the forbidden area, you can try squirting them with a Super Soaker or similar water gun. This method reinforces the notion that they are unwanted in your planting bed. Since you can't sit in your garden the whole day, every day, instead you can get a water device, such as a “*Scarecrow Sprinkler*”, which detects an intruder's presence and fires a blast of water at it.

- **Sound Barriers**

- 1) Cats have a much higher hearing range than humans. “*Cat Stop*” is an electronic cat deterrent device that operates on a high frequency that is inaudible to humans but unbearable for cats. Installation is easy. You install the device facing the garden or your yard. A motion sensor detects the intruder's presence, and *Cat Stop* gives off its high-frequency sound, scaring off the cat.
- 2) The “*SsssCat!*” repellent device uses sound and a sprayed repellent and is motion-activated.
- 3) You can also make a noisy device by placing marbles or pebbles in an empty can that can be upset when a cat walks on a fence. Or, use a sensitive bell or wind chimes that make noise when a cat causes a vibration.

- **Smells Attract Cats**

- 1) Don't feed your dogs or other cats outside in your yard. Food smells will attract other animals, including cats. After you use your outdoor grill, thoroughly clean it to remove food bits and minimize the food smells. Also, make sure your trash bins are secure, so felines cannot rummage through your rubbish.
- 2) Wash urine spray from walls or doors as soon as you detect it. Urine spray is how cats mark their territory. Clean with an enzyme-based odor neutralizer to wash away territorial markers and to prevent repeated spraying.

- **Other Cat Attractors**

- 1) Cats like to stalk prey for fun. Make sure that your yard is not hospitable for critters that cats like to chase. Clear away brush and clutter that can harbor mice and other small prey.

- 2) Board up all holes that can give access to sheds, garages, or areas under decks or porches. Feral cats and their prey may seek refuge in any place they can get into.
- 3) Keep bird feeders safe by using feeder baffles and placing feeders where cats won't endanger the birds.

- **Designate a Cat-Friendly Area**

- 1) If you do not want the cats to leave entirely, but you want to curb cats from ransacking your entire yard, strike a compromise. Plant a separate bed of catnip plants in a small corner of the yard. Not all cats go nuts over catnip plants, but those that do like a catnip patch might make that area a private sanctuary and favorite hangout.
- 2) The rest of the garden or yard will be left alone if you make a sandbox just for cats and keep it near the catnip plants. The sandbox will be a magnet for cat poop. You will have to clean up the cat poop afterward, but at least it will be in one logical place.

- **Curbing the Stray Population**

Your yard may attract pets whose owners allow them to wander outdoors, strays who formerly had homes, and feral cats. Use these tactics in addition to the cat repellent and cleaning methods.

- 1) **Talk to Your Neighbors.** Work with your neighbors to prevent their pets from visiting your yard or hunting birds you want to protect. Let the neighbors know that you do not want cats in your yard. Suggest to neighbors who have indoor-outdoor cats that their cats wear bells and bright collars to help birds see them and escape. Also, if the whole neighborhood works together to reduce feral cat visits, the problem will lessen.
- 2) **Humane Traps.** When other tactics fail, check to see if you are legally allowed to set humane traps and capture wayward or feral cats. Turn stray felines over to animal control or shelters. If you discover the pet has tags, contact the owner to pick up their animal, and discuss the issue with the owner.

- **Champaign County Animal Control**

With the permission of the property owner, Champaign County Animal Control will set traps to catch cats. They will then take them to Animal Control and spay/neuter them. Once they are healed they will return the cats where they were trapped. Because they spay/neuter the cats, this will reduce litters of kittens over the years and we'll begin to see fewer and fewer cats as time goes by.