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# virginia home food production



## FACT SHEET

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BLACKSBURG, VIRGINIA

### HOME AND GARDEN WILDLIFE PEST COMPLAINTS

#### Fundamentals

Wild animals become pests not because they desire to annoy humans but because human beings provide the essentials of life, sometimes in great abundance. To solve pest problems, the first step is to determine what attracts wildlife to your home, grounds, or gardens.

Wild animals live where they can find food and water within easy reach of escape cover, where they can hide and raise their young. Specific requirements vary from species to species depending on the body size of the animal and other physical characteristics, such as whether or not it can fly (birds, bats) or whether or not it needs standing or flowing water (salamanders, turtles, muskrats).

The home garden represents a gold mine for animals that feed on plant materials. Plant parts such as blossoms, young leaves and fruits are rich in carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, and minerals. In a typical home garden the soil is fortified with fertilizers and lime. The improved soil plus the culturing techniques of the gardener result in far greater concentrations of succulent, nutritious foods for plant-eating wildlife than

exist in adjoining fields, woods, or yards. It is not surprising that home gardens attract a wide variety of wildlife, including rabbits, woodchucks, squirrels, box turtles, muskrats, opossums, raccoons, and deer.

In areas where the predominant plant cover is forest, the fertilized lawn and flower garden will attract wildlife for the same reasons as the garden. Mice and rats and occasionally raccoons, opossums, and squirrels can find concentrations of food in our kitchen cupboards, pantries, and grain bins in barns, and small animal houses outside the home. In these instances, wildlife come into contact with man because food is provided by man.

Abundant food is not the only way mankind attracts wildlife. Our homes and grounds often furnish resting and nesting cover for mice, bats, rats, skunks, opossums, snakes, and lizards. Attics, basements, shutters, stacks of lumber, piles of debris, dense shrubbery around buildings, and earth surfaces covered by frames around porches, homes and outbuildings all are preferred homes of wildlife.

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### Actions

In the majority of pest problems, the objection is more to the damage caused by wildlife than to the wildlife itself. In fact, wildlife adds interesting sidelights to our daily lives and the presence of wild animals can improve the sale value of properties. Therefore, first recommendations are directed to controlling damage rather than eliminating wildlife.

1. Restrict or eliminate access to food. Gardens - fence gardens with 4 x 2" mesh, welded, galvanized wire. Bury the fence 6" to 12" to keep burrowing animals out. If the damage by raccoons is severe, install an electric fence 2" above the top of the welded wire fence. Fruit Trees - cover fruit trees with cloth or synthetic fiber mesh to prevent bird damage to ripening fruit. Grain bins, pantries, and cupboards - locate access points and block off with heavy wood or sheet metal. Trap out or poison resident pests (see below). Garbage cans - Build a wooden frame to set cans in which will prevent pests from tipping cans. Use tight lids.
2. Eliminate access to resting and nesting cover. Buildings - Seal off entry points by replacing broken windows, blocking holes with wood, or installing 1/2" mesh, welded wire hardware cloth. Grounds - Remove piles of debris and lumber from vicinity of house and buildings. Cut back or remove dense shrubbery.

- (3) Trap Individuals. Use standard mouse and rat snap traps, special mole traps, jump traps or live traps for raccoons, opossums. See your hardware and farm supply dealer for traps and trapping advice. Wildlife extension publications offer specific notes on most trapping situations.

### Pesticides

Pesticides kill wildlife and, if they are not used carefully, these chemicals can harm wildlife which are not pests, dogs and cats, and even children. Also, except for anticoagulant poisons for rodents, gas bombs for woodchucks, and pesticides for flocking birds, there are few pesticides cleared by the Environmental Protection Agency for use on wildlife. Check with your Extension Office for recommendations.

Usually, the situations that attract wildlife will not be changed by pesticides. After the current pests die or are repelled, a new new crop will often appear. Therefore, it is better to change the situation that attracts wildlife than to use chemicals.