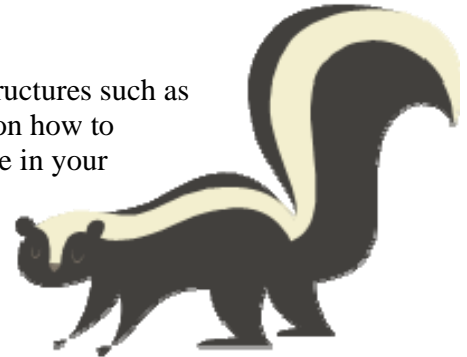


How to Discourage Wild Animals from Getting Too Cozy

Fall seems to be a time when wild animals want into human-built structures such as crawl spaces, attics, sheds and eaves. Here are several suggestions on how to discourage uninvited animal guests from making themselves at home in your home or outbuildings.

Animals can be discouraged from staying in many of the same ways you might discourage dreaded human guests. In a nutshell - provide no food, make their life miserable, then make it easy for them to leave.



Many times, homeowners unwittingly provide food for wild animals. Is your pet food outside? Put it in the house. Are there bags of oats or corn in the shed? Store them in animal-proof containers. Are bird feeders accessible lunch counters for mammals too? Make feeders impossible to access except by fly-in diners.

Then make it intolerable for furry guests to stay one minute longer. Use a combination of bad odors, loud noises and bright lights to inspire animal exodus:

Try placing ammonia-soaked rags in the corners of the attic, crawl space or shed. Or use mothballs. Both are noxious smells to mammals.

Leave a radio tuned to a 24-hour station with loud music in their vicinity. Or keep a bright light on in the space.

How do you know if your furry guests have vacated the premises? Listen for sounds of animals moving around. Sprinkle flour on the ground outside the one opening left unclosed. Check for tracks leading out. Or cover the opening with a light plastic that the animal can break through when it leaves. Or construct a one-way door over the opening that allows the animals to leave but prevents them from returning.

Once they have high-tailed it out of there, close off openings so they can't return. It is essential that you are certain that the animals have left before you seal off any openings; otherwise, these animals may starve to death and then you will end up with a big odor problem. Rather than kill wild animals by trapping or live trapping and relocating them, it may be better in the long run to make space inhospitable to wild houseguests.

Why discourage rather than trap? Even though one animal is relocated or killed, other animals may simply move in to take the previous critter's place. Also, live trapping and moving a wild animal to a new territory often means death for that animal. A relocated animal will be on unfamiliar ground, and will not know where to find food or shelter. It will also have to compete with resident populations for existing resources, and will be at a definite disadvantage.

With a little effort, a 'nuisance' animal such as a squirrel, skunk, raccoon, or opossum can be encouraged to vacate your property while still remaining in familiar territory where it knows where to find food and shelter.

If you care about the fate of your wildlife guests, before evicting an animal make sure that it has no babies in its nest. In spring and summer, there are likely to be babies around. If you are patient, allow the mother to raise her babies, then encourage her and her offspring to leave.

In general, when dealing with unwanted wild animals, it is best to wait until they have moved off on their own accord before sealing openings under eaves or porches. If the creatures are doing no harm, a little patience on your part will reduce the stress for all involved.

This article adapted from Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, USDA. Please contact Ken Churches at cdcalaveras@ucdavis.edu or (209) 754-6475 with your agricultural questions. To speak with a Certified Master Gardener: Calaveras (209) 754-2880, Tuolumne (209) 533-5696, Amador (209) 223-6837, El Dorado (530) 621-5543.