

Wildlife in Your Yard and Garden



Situation: Animals are getting into my garden and eating my plants and flowers!

Why This Happens: Gardens are full of delicious food for all types of wildlife. When animals “raid” a vegetable garden or dig up a flower bulb, they don’t know they are “trespassing” or “stealing,” and they are not deliberately doing this to frustrate you or try to drive you crazy! They are simply utilizing the resources in their environment in order to survive.

FAQs and Humane Solutions:

“Animals are getting into my garden and eating my plants and flowers, what can I do to stop them?”

Tolerance – Any time wildlife and people share living space there are going to be conflicts over resources to varying degrees. It is unrealistic to expect that wildlife must never have any effect on your garden and landscaping. So, if the damage caused by animals is occasional and slight – a nibble here and a nibble there --you may not need to do anything. That being said, the best time to take action to suppress or even stop more serious landscape damage is when it first appears. It is easier to stop further damage when the animals are in an exploratory stage, for example, you just notice that deer are beginning to browse on your shrubs in early winter, or spring seedlings are just coming up in your vegetable garden and you’ve noticed the tender new plants are being nibbled on.

Scare Tactics – It is often possible to temporarily frighten animals away from plants you are trying to protect, especially when there is other “natural” food available for the animals and they haven’t already gotten into the habit of dining on the plants you’re trying to protect.

Animals can quickly become accustomed to some scare tactics, especially if the scare tactics are continuous or if the “scary” tactic doesn’t move or change positions over time. For example, the plastic owls and fake snakes sold for this purpose may work for a day or two, but when the animals get the idea that these figures don’t move at all, they’ll no longer be frightened by them. See the accompanying photos for examples of some scare tactics that can be effective. We recommend and sell both the **ScareCrow**, motion-activated sprayer, and **Irri-tape**, iridescent Mylar ribbon.

Repellents – These are products can be effective in reducing damage when they are sprayed on individual plants or small groups of plants, especially when there is other food available to animals and they have not already established a habit of feeding on the plants you are trying to protect. Repellents are NOT effective at keeping animals away from an entire garden or out of your yard.



Critter Ridder® is a non-toxic, easy to apply, pepper-based, granular repellent

Liquid Fence® can help protect plants from damage by deer, rabbits, and woodchucks



The **ScareCrow®** frightens animals with a blast of water when they trip its motion detector

Irri-tape® is an iridescent plastic ribbon that shimmers and flutters in the wind



Fencing – For many species, the most effective, long-term solution is to install fencing around your garden. Some gardeners make fencing panel frames using 2" x 2" lumber and staple chicken wire or other similar fencing to the outside of these panels. With vertical stakes for support, the panels are wired or cable-tied together end-to-end to make a fence. These panels can be put up when they are needed, such as in the early spring, and taken down and stacked out of the way when they are not needed

- Rabbits - A two foot high fence will keep rabbits out. Use chicken-wire or fencing with 1" x 1" or 1" x 2" or smaller mesh. Planting in raised garden beds can also effectively exclude rabbits (see photos). Make sure that fencing is installed tight to the ground to prevent rabbits from slipping under the fence.
- Woodchucks - The fence should be 4 feet high and be buried 12 or more inches below ground. Use mesh that is no larger than 3" x 3" (using smaller mesh that is smaller than this will help keep rabbits out, too). Woodchucks are great diggers, so ideally, the bottom of the fence will be bent or joined with another piece of fencing at 90-degrees outward in an "L". The bottom of the "L" should be 12 to 24 inches wide. This will discourage animals from digging under the fence. **See the diagram below.** Woodchucks are good climbers, so you may need to flare the top 1 or 2 feet of the fence outward at a 45-degree angle to prevent them from going over the fence. Or instead of flaring the fence outward as described, reportedly, leaving the top 1 or two feet of the fence unsupported by fence posts will make a woodchuck feel insecure about climbing on this "floppy" portion of fence.
- Squirrels and Chipmunks – These nimble animals are excellent climbers, so fencing is very unlikely to provide much of a deterrent.
- Deer – A four-foot high fence around small garden plots can discourage deer from casually browsing on garden plants when other "natural" foods are available to the deer. For larger plots and for times when natural food is not abundant (i.e. winter and early spring) the fence will need to be at least six feet high. When natural foods are very scarce, deer have been known to leap over eight-foot high fences to get to food!

"Are there any types of plants that deer, rabbits, and woodchucks do not like?"

No plant should be considered to be 100% deer- or rabbit-proof. However, there are a number of plants that have track-records of being deer- and/or rabbit-resistant under most conditions. We suggest that you check with a local, experienced horticulturalist, Master Gardener, or experienced garden center staff for a list of plants (ideally native Wisconsin plants) they recommend for your area.

"I just laid some sod and animals are pulling the sod back at night!" Why are they doing this and how can I stop them?"

Raccoons or skunks are pulling the sod up to get to the tasty grubs and worms that like to live under the watered sod. The animals typically stop this behavior once you stop watering. But to get them to stop this behavior, you can try not watering the sod at night, when these animals are active, and instead set up a **ScareCrow** motion-detector sprayer to frighten the animals away with a blast of high-pressure water.

Other methods to try are to sprinkle **Critter Ridder®** granules around the new sod, but outside of the area you are watering (water will wash away the repellent). Another good method is to temporarily cover the sodded area with overlapping strips of chicken-wire mesh. The perimeter and overlapping areas of the mesh should be held down with bricks or rocks, or staked down with landscape staples.



Hardware cloth for fencing or animal exclusion is available at any hardware store



Raised garden beds like these will keep rabbits out. The bed below uses an arch of hardware cloth over the top to protect tender plants from deer



"How can I keep skunks and raccoons from digging holes in my lawn?"

Skunks and raccoons may dig small divots in your lawn when they forage for grubs and worms. The grubs can kill your grass/sod by eating the roots of the grass, so the skunks or raccoons are actually doing you a favor by consuming these pests. Just repair the divots by tamping them down with your foot.

But if you really can't tolerate the after-effect of the animals' foraging activities, a short-term solution to keep the raccoons and skunks away is to use The **ScareCrow**, motion sensor sprayer. The **ScareCrow** will give an animal a harmless, but frightening, blast of water when they walk into the sprayer's motion-sensor field. Or, you could try sprinkling **Critter Ridder** pepper-based non-toxic repellent around or on small areas to temporarily keep the animals away.

A longer-term solution would be to treat your lawn for grubs. "Beneficial nematodes" are organisms that can be purchased at a garden store or over the Internet. Once introduced to your lawn, over time, the nematodes can control the grubs, thus removing the incentive for skunks and raccoons to dig in your lawn.

We recommend that you consult with an experienced Master Gardener or horticulturalist in your area for information about treating your lawn for grubs.



A ring of hardware cloth stapled to a stake driven into the ground can protect shrubs and small trees from rabbits and deer



*A ribbon of **Irri-tape** attached to 6"- 8" -high stakes in or around the garden may help keep animals away.*



***Irri-tape**, cut into strips and stapled to stakes so they flutter in the breeze, can help deter animals.*





This garden is protected using chicken wire framed with 2"x4"s attached to 4"x4" posts. The height is 4 feet, enough to keep cottontails out and to stop casual foraging by deer.



2"x4" wire screening attached to metal posts. This 3 foot tall fence will discourage casual foraging by deer. To keep rabbits out, use smaller-mesh fencing



This sturdy 6-foot high fence provides great protection for this garden



Hardware cloth covering the soil in a flower pot. This will help keep chipmunks and squirrels from digging in the soil. On a larger scale, this method also works to protect buried bulbs before they sprout.



Plastic tubing used to protect the trunk of a small tree from damage by rabbits. Ideally, the tube should be 3 feet higher than the deepest expected snow level.



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