

Preventing Wildlife in the Garden

Written by
Travis Birdsell, Ashe County Extension Director

The best medicine is prevention. It is much easier than dealing with established problems, but not all conflicts can be prevented. Here are techniques that can prevent and manage common wildlife related issues.

- Assess the damage – determine how much damage to tolerate before intervening.
- Identify and monitor – It is important to know what is causing the damage and how often it is occurring to plan for interventions and disrupt pattern behavior.
- Prevention is always a first line of defense.
 - ⇒ Secure or remove food sources (dog food, cat food or bird seed) .
 - ⇒ Remove any brush or wood piles near buildings.
 - ⇒ Block off decks, porches, roof and basement access points with wire netting or steel wool and spray foam.
 - ⇒ Seal garbage cans.
 - ⇒ Create barriers around prized plants or flower beds with fencing or bird netting for cover
- Scare tactics can be used temporarily to keep animals out of the yard.
 - ⇒ Flash tape, noise makers or scarecrows are most effective when moved to a new location every few days. Motion lights can work, but eventually get used to. Flashing or strobe lights work best, but also work at upsetting neighbors.
 - ⇒ A garden hose that is motion triggered can be very effective.
- Manage Effectively
 - ⇒ Trapping – What are you going to do with it when you catch it? Take it to animal control or call them?
 - ⇒ Lethal control – Can take to veterinarian, when feral it is also considered a humane strategy to shoot.



Deer

Unless under very hungry circumstances, deer will generally not select medicinal plants, sticky or hairy leaves or stems, and foliage with lemony or minty fragrance.

- Planting some of these plants near garden borders may help deter deer.
- Plant cages can help, but remember deer are tall and can reach over if too short.
- Fencing – electric is most effective.
- Repellents
 - ⇒ Human hair (*has no scientific evidence that it works*)
 - ⇒ Deer do not like the smell of egg byproducts
 - ⇒ Soap has been proven effective in micro situations.
One bar = one square yard of protection
 - ⇒ Do not use mothballs



Moles

A depredation permit is required to kill moles, you then have ability to use spear type traps, or Rodenticides. Moles are insectivores, but earthworms are as much of their diet as grubs. Moles are more active in rainy periods Eastern moles are most likely the culprit in yards.

- Stomp in tunnels every morning and evening.
- Using products with Permatil has been shown to be effective.
- Sonic devices can push moles away however, they may get used to this over time.
- Castor oil has been shown to be effective, start at house and push moles out.
- Aerate yard for better drainage.
- Consider getting a dog.

Rabbits

- Remove brush piles, weed patches, stone piles and other debris. Controlling vegetation along ditch banks, fence rows and wood lines will help.
- Small mesh cages around trees can help.
- Dried blood is most effective on rabbits but it can attract other wildlife.
- Electric fences with strands at four, eight and twelve inches is effective.
- Must have hunting license or verified damage and depredation permit to kill.

When preventative or scare tactics fail, it might be time to consider legal, lethal techniques to address ongoing investment destroying damage. Contact your Wildlife Resources Commission officer for more information on permits. Depredation permits are an option. Evaluate the strategy, every implemented technique must be monitored for effectiveness. If the chosen strategy is not working, then additional methods can be employed. Intentionally attracting one type of wildlife can also unintentionally attract undesired wildlife. Unfortunately there are no single, quick or guaranteed solutions to most animal problems. We often learn to coexist.

Management Strategies

- Habitat modification – changes in habitat to make it less appealing, including removal of food or shelter.
- Exclusion – creating physical barriers to wildlife.
- Repellents – frightening sound, taste, odor or tactile sensation.
- Trapping – capturing the animal. There are rules regulating some animal trapping seasons, also no releases are permitted on federal or state owned lands (New River State Park, Mount Jefferson State Park or the Blue Ridge Parkway).
- Lethal Control – killing the animal. *(This varies by species and may include legal harvest during hunting season, take under a depredation permit, or take during the act of causing substantial property damage).*
- Crows – Visual or chemical repellants, there is a legal hunting season for crows if you prefer lethal means.
- Woodpeckers – Classified as migratory nongame birds are protected by federal migratory bird treaty act.
- Cats – Do not let cats outdoors, they can devastate bird populations.
 - ⇒ Feed pets indoors
 - ⇒ Repellents only, motion activated sprinklers and cat chasing dogs have proved effective
- Snakes – They are there to eat the rodents. Just keep a safe distance until they move through your property looking for food.
- Voles – They are vegetarians, love bulbs and will generally “collar” shrubs and small trees at base or on large roots. Using underground gravel perimeter several inches wide and six inches deep can greatly help. A depredation permit can be obtained, no proven repellants. Permatil has shown some success as a deterrent.

