

There's a Critter in My Attic!

We share our environment here in West Amwell with an incredibly diverse wildlife population, including hundreds of species of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and resident and visiting birds. Although we may enjoy having these animals around, that doesn't mean we want to share our living space or our gardens' bounty with them.

Wild animals can be noisy, messy and destructive when they attempt to share living quarters with humans. Read on for some tips for preventing wildlife from moving in and— if they've already taken up residence—ways to encourage them to move on.

Preventing An Invasion

Here are some easy ways to prevent an "invasion" of wildlife:

- Install chimney caps.

Installing caps on furnace and fireplace chimneys will help prevent animals from getting into your house via your chimney.

- Secure trash cans.

Many animals are attracted to household trash. Keep your trash in a closed garage until trash day or use a sturdy container with a secure lid.

- Avoid feeding pets outside.

Pet food is even more attractive to some wildlife than trash! If you feed your pets outside, be sure to bring in the bowls as soon as your pets are finished eating.

- Keep your home in good repair.

Animals can squeeze into small spaces! Seal holes and cracks in and around the foundation and along the roofline of your house. (This tip also has the added advantage of making your home more energy-efficient.)

- Prune branches near your house.

Branches that hang over your house are easy routes to the roof and windows of your house. Prune branches that are close to or touching your house.

- Protect your garden.

The best way to prevent small mammals from helping themselves to your buffet is to put up a simple chicken wire or mesh fence. This fence should be wobbly at the top and extend into the ground, bending outward another 8-12 inches to form an L shape that creates a false bottom to keep animals from digging beneath it. To deter deer, try a commercial repellent that is safe for food plants, such as Deer Out, or a homemade recipe (at right).

- If you keep chickens, enclose the birds at night.

Secure the coop with well-fitting doors and a solid, concrete floor. Surround the coop with fencing that extends 6-8 inches underground to prevent animals from digging into the chicken yard.

Encouraging Animals to Move On

If wild animals have taken up residence in or under your house or shed, wait until they have vacated and then exclude them (discourage them from returning).

Young are often present in the spring, summer and early fall so be careful not to separate them from their parents.

The family will usually move out on their own when they are old enough to do so. If not, following are some tips for making their surroundings less inviting:

- Add the human touch.

Turn on a bright light and leave a radio tuned to a talk show near the site.

- Deter with odor.

Many animals are sensitive to odors, so deter them with ammonia-soaked rags.

- Show them the door.

If you discover an animal in your living space, remain calm and provide a way for it to leave. Close interior doors, turn out the lights, open a door or window, and wait for the animal to locate the exit. (Although a very small percentage of bats carry rabies—much less than 1% of the population—you should contact the health department for instructions if a bat is found in a room where a person is sleeping.)

- Block their return.

Exclude animals from attics and basements while they are outside the house—nocturnal animals while they are out feeding at night, diurnal animals during the day. Set up a one-way door or stretch a piece of plastic across the entrance.

Close the opening permanently when you are certain activity has ceased and all the animals are gone.

Also, although it may be tempting to remove an animal from your property by trapping and relocating it, this is not a long-term solution because other animals will take the place of those trapped unless the conditions that attracted them to begin with are corrected. Furthermore, relocation causes stress for the animal, for young left behind, and for existing populations at the place of release. For these reasons, it is illegal to trap and relocate wildlife in New Jersey.

HOMEMADE DEER REPELLENT

Mix together in a blender:

2 cups of water

5 cloves of fresh garlic

1 cup of chopped onions

5 Tbsp. powdered hot pepper

Pour into a covered container and let stand for 24 hours. Strain and mix with 1 gallon of water. Apply to plants with a sprayer.