



By Barbara Elmore, HCMG

## Snakessssss!

As if back pain, stinging insects, itchy plants and heat ailments were not sufficient reasons for gardeners to flee their back yards, people are reporting backyard rattlesnake sightings in San Antonio and areas closer to the Kerrville-Bandera- Fredericksburg-Comfort areas.

Snake catchers Tom Regner in Austin ([www.batspecialist.com](http://www.batspecialist.com)) and Ed Lessard in San Antonio said that they are hearing more from callers now that spring has arrived. Regner roots out snakes in commercial buildings as part of his waterproofing business; Lessard is president of the South Texas Herpetology Association ([www.kingsnake.com](http://www.kingsnake.com)), whose members pick up dangerous snakes in various parts of San Antonio and the surrounding area.

Both men grew up catching snakes as boys and offer sensible suggestions for dealing with snakes that you meet. Carry a stick, Regner said, and remember that a snake can strike a distance that is one- third to one-half its body length, depending on what type of snake it is. Back away from snakes at a slow pace, Lessard suggests. Don't run, because a snake perceives that as aggression.

Here are other do-it-yourself tips for dealing with snakes.

- Leave them alone. Texas has four kinds of venomous snakes, but most are not harmful. The four to avoid are rattlesnakes, copperheads, coral snakes and cottonmouth water moccasins. Residents in and around San Antonio are most likely to see the coral snake and the rattlesnake. Learn to identify them.



- If leaving them alone is not possible, call the non-emergency number of the police, sheriff or fire department in your area to report the snake. They can tell you what to do next. Few pest control companies deal with dangerous snakes.

- Stop moving if you hear a snake. Then back away slowly from it. An added warning: Rattlesnakes are learning not to rattle. "The ones that don't get caught are learning to be quiet," Regner said.

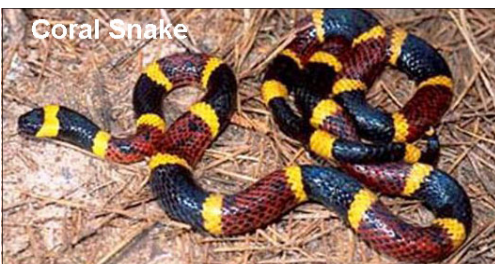
improvement stores. Snakes do not dig, so they won't go under it, Regner said.

- Watch for snakes mainly on cool mornings, because if your compost pile is hot (as it should be if working properly), snakes will crawl on top of it to get warm.

- Put an electric wire around the compost pile. When the snakes touch it, they will recoil. • Bury a 10- gallon, smooth-sided bucket in the ground. The snake will go in and can't get out. Use a stick to raise the handle and carry the bucket away.



- To prevent snakes in your compost pile, surround the pile with silt fencing, a black fabric used for erosion control. It's available in 2-foot heights. You can get it in home im-



- Use a snake trap. You can make your own by putting glue traps into a cardboard box. Snakes will crawl in and stick in the glue. You can remove the glue traps and release the snake. You can also find these online.

- Get rid of weeds, boards, and junk, which attract rats, lizards and frogs. "Snakes will go where there is warmth, shelter, and to look for animals to eat," Regner noted.