



Animal Pests - What Can You Do?

by Carol Brinkman, HCMG

Squirrels

Making trees, attics and buildings squirrel-proof is a permanent solution to the problem. Squirrels usually gain entrance to attics and other structures from the roof, especially if tree limbs overlap the roof line. This can be solved by trimming tree limbs back at least 8 to 10 feet from the roof. If this is not possible, sheet metal bands can be placed around the trunks of the trees to discourage squirrels from climbing them. The bands should be about 2 feet wide and 6 to 8 feet from the ground. Live traps can be used to reduce local squirrel populations or to remove individual squirrels from an attic. Effective baits include fruit, peanut butter, nuts and seeds. At the present time, there are no toxicants, fumigants or repellents registered for use against tree squirrels in Texas.

Raccoons

Chances are raccoons are digging up flowerbeds in search for grub worms or insects as a food source. Spraying the area with an insecticide will help alleviate the problem. You should always carefully read and follow insecticide label instructions. Trapping is the most satisfactory way to remove raccoons. In urban areas, it is advisable to use live traps because a dog or cat, if accidentally caught, can be released unharmed. A live trap with dimensions of at least 9 inches x 9 inches x 27 inches is adequate. Bait these traps with fruit, chicken parts, sardines or meat. When placing the traps outside, use fruit for bait as the likelihood of catching cats is reduced.

Rabbits

Modifying the habitat to make it less attractive to rabbits is often an effective method of control. The removal of brush piles, weedy patches, rock or lumber piles, etc., will sometimes cause rabbits to leave in search of more suitable habitat. This method is especially effective in suburban areas, where less suitable habitat is available. Rabbits can be excluded from an area by constructing a rabbit-proof fence. A fence of woven wire or 2 inch poultry netting, 2 to 3 feet high, can be placed around gardens, flower beds or other places where protection is needed. The bottom of the fence should be buried in the ground at least 6 inches to prevent rabbits from digging under the fence. The use of live traps can be an effective way to remove cottontails. The traps should be placed where the rabbits are feeding or resting. Corn cobs, dried leafy alfalfa and clover are good cold-weather baits. Apples, carrots, lettuce and cabbage are good baits to use during the warmer months. Several repellents are registered for rabbit control, and sometimes cause rabbits to stay away. Most of these are applied to the area where the damage is occurring. Repellents are usually available from garden supply centers, feed stores and hardware stores

Armadillos

Since most of the damage armadillos cause is a result of their digging for insects and other invertebrates in the soil, an insecticide can be used to make the area less attractive to armadillos. Live trapping is also an effective way to capture armadillos. Traps should be placed in trails near fences or beside buildings. Over-ripe or spoiled fruit, earthworms or fishing worms are good baits.

Then There Are the Birds

The only way to deal with birds is avoidance. Netting should work but it must be "bird-proof". You might want to check out Grow-Web. Birds will peck ANY color of tomato. Some have tried putting tomato-size red Christmas ornaments next to the green tomatoes before they ripen. The idea is the birds will be fooled into thinking you are growing the hardest, worst tasting tomatoes and not even wait around for the green ones to ripen!