

KEEPING SKUNK AND RACCOON HOMES OUT OF YOURS

The blossoms of spring have made their appearance in our backyards, as have the visits of love-struck skunks and raccoons, searching for a family home. A nest of raccoons and skunks, and the atmosphere of their happy hovel is, however, not always practical under our doorsteps and around our gardens. Fortunately, there are easy preventative measures we can take to discourage this little part of spring from blooming in our backyards.

The most important thing to realize is the family of animals has selected your home for their home for a reason. It is safe, warm, dark, dry and close to a reliable food source. It is crucial to work with your neighbors if you are going to successfully entice the creatures to either move on or pass your block by.



The easiest way is to ensure that there are no potential homes or free, buffet-type meals around your yard. Composts and rubbish bins should be kept securely closed, fallen fruit from trees removed immediately, bird-feeding areas kept clean and NO pet food kept or fed, anywhere, outside. Potential animal dens under porches, sheds, sundecks and hot tubs can be blocked off by fencing, screening or closing any holes. Skunks and raccoons can use a space as small as 8 cm (the size of a grapefruit) for their front door. Woodpiles should be kept neat, orderly, away from your house and checked regularly.

Should you already have a family of unwelcome visitors, there are several simple and effective measures you can take to encourage your new striped neighbors to move along without bringing harm or grief to any involved. Keeping in mind that both skunks and raccoons are nocturnal (active at night), the following methods are best tried after dusk. It is also imperative to remember that the animals are wild, filled with the aggressive passion of the season and accustomed to using their sharp teeth. Approaching or trying to handle raccoons and skunks or placing your hands in or around the entrance to their home is very dangerous. Therefore the following should be done ONLY with a long wooden stick, like a broomstick. Plastic can be easily punctured or torn and metal can break the animal's teeth.

1. A mechanics utility/ trouble light (a bulb enclosed by a metal grid at the end of a long electrical cable) can be pushed inside the entrance with a long wooden handle.
2. The same can be done with a small radio tuned to a talk or rock station.

These measures change the dark and quiet den to a lighted, noisy and altogether unsuitable home for both the careful mother and her expected young. You may want to bear in mind that the radio volume is intended only to offend the raccoons and skunks in the hole and does not need to be particularly loud. In addition, the following instructions are for a bleach deterrent, which fills the raccoon or skunk home with an odor which they find as offensive as you do theirs.

1. Pour two to three centimetres of bleach into an old ice cream bucket or similar container.
2. Place an old rag, cloth, t-shirt or towel in the bucket to absorb the bleach and prevent it from evaporating.
3. Ensure that the lid is on the container securely.
4. Using a pair of scissors make small holes in the lid so the smell of the bleach can enter the atmosphere.
5. Push the bucket into the den, using a long wooden stick.
6. Top up the buckets with bleach (two to three cm) nightly until you are sure the animal has left.

To prevent animals from entering your vegetable garden or backyard pond, an effective deterrent is a low voltage electric cord, available at garden stores, that will lightly shock but not harm the animal. The cord should be used overnight and placed at about 15 centimeters above the ground, surrounding the pond or garden. While both animals are extremely agile neither is adapted to jumping, meaning the cord should be low enough to prevent them from going under and high enough to stop them from going over.

We wish you good luck and please call us if you have any further difficulties.