

# Solving Problems with Raccoons



Given the raccoon's superb ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions, it's not surprising that conflicts with humans often occur. Raccoons aren't

averse to raiding gardens, garbage cans, bird feeders, fish ponds, or even your kitchen pantry (a pet door is an open invitation). Likewise, chimneys, attics, and porches are all attractive denning sites from the raccoon perspective. Cities and suburbs also provide extensive "subway systems" for these intelligent and opportunistic animals, who are quite comfortable using storm sewers as underground roadways.

Raccoons can cause damage, such as getting into crops, or they can simply be nuisances by occupying chimneys or "panhandling" at campgrounds. Before you begin taking steps to resolve a raccoon problem, however, make sure the animal causing your headaches really *is* a raccoon. Raccoons are often blamed for more damage than they actually do, while neighborhood dogs and crows get off scot-free.

If you're not able to observe the animals directly, you're best bet is to identify their tracks. Flour, cornstarch, and other nontoxic powders can be used to check for footprints on hard surfaces. Raccoons who are using attics or chimneys usually begin to make noise at dusk and just before dawn. (Conversely, tree squirrels are active by day and quiet at night.) The sound of raccoons' movement is a helpful clue—unlike the light scurrying of squirrels, raccoons sound more like Sumo wrestlers practicing. If young cubs are present, you may also hear chattering or purring noises, especially when the mother returns to the den.

Waiting things out is often the best option—many raccoon problems, such as occupation of a building, resolve themselves within a few days or weeks. This is particularly important when a mother raccoon with young is present. Raccoon cubs are unable to fend for themselves for a long period of time after birth, and usually do not even venture out of the den until eight or nine weeks of age. In emergencies, gentle harassment may encourage the mother to relocate her young, but there is always the risk that one or more cubs may be abandoned in the process. Trapping and moving the family will almost inevitably lead to separation and the probable death of the young.

**Chimneys and Attics:** Raccoons will often use uncapped



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chimneys and attics for denning and for birthing and raising their young. Assuming the animals can leave on their own, harassment techniques can be used to encourage raccoons to move on. You might try leaving the attic lights on, and/or placing a battery-operated radio in the denning area, tuned to a talk radio station with the volume turned up. The best time to use these strategies is right before the raccoon would normally leave for her nightly foray. Once you're sure the animals have left, prevent further problems by installing an approved chimney cap or repairing and sealing attic openings. *Never use smoke or fire to drive animals out of chimneys.* This will almost certainly kill young animals—whether raccoons, squirrels, opossums, or birds—who are not physically able to leave on their own.

**Yards and Gardens:** Discourage garbage raiding by placing cans at the curb on the day of pick-up rather than the night before. Place cans inside a shed or garage between pick-ups. You may also secure the lids with bungee cords, rope tie-downs, or weights. Raccoons are attracted to birdseed and suet, and can cause considerable damage to garden fruits and vegetables, particularly grapes and corn. Garden plundering often occurs right before the foods are ready to be picked, so extra vigilance at these times (chasing animals away and using lights or radios to create disturbances) may drive them off long enough to harvest the crop. Fruit trees and bird feeder poles can be protected with conical metal guards that keep animals from climbing.

For more information on raccoons, [download our full-color fact sheet](#).

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