

Solving Problems with Snakes



US Fish & Wildlife
Service/R. Mount

Encounters with snakes in residential yards, except for those with venomous snakes, are usually fleeting.

In most circumstances, the snake should just be allowed to go his own way. Venomous snakes, however, should be removed and relocated by an experienced handler such as your local humane society, animal control agency, or professional wildlife control operator.

This does not mean, however, that the snake must be killed. In fact, decapitation is a particularly cruel and inhumane form of euthanasia. Because snakes' oxygen demands are low, their body parts remain alive for hours, and their severed heads retain signs of consciousness, such as pupil dilation and tongue licking when stimulated. It is not inconceivable that snakes can still feel pain during this time.

Situations in which snakes appear indoors usually fall into one of two categories. The first is when snakes enter accidentally, in which case they should be captured and released outside so they don't succumb to lack of prey and/or moisture. The second occurs when such species as rat, king, or black snakes enter—often following mouse trails or seeking shelter—and take up permanent residence, if allowed.

Upon discovering a snake, remain calm to avoid driving the animal into hiding. Removing a snake can be as simple as gently guiding it out an open door. If that's not possible, you may cover the snake with an empty wastebasket or pail, and put a weight on top; or confine the snake in a room or corner with barriers such as boards and boxes. Call an experienced handler to humanely remove the animal as soon as possible.

If the snake is not venomous, there is no reason to relocate him. Animals released into unfamiliar surroundings have low rates of survival. To discourage snakes from taking up residence in your yard, remove piles of brush, rocks, wood or other debris that provide likely hiding places for snakes and their prey. Any items left outside that attract rodents may also attract snakes.

Snake Myths

Snakes dig holes and burrow in backyards. Snakes are physically unable to dig holes, but do use existing holes of small rodents for shelter and food.

A snake in the yard is a danger to children and pets. Any snake can bite a child or pet if it feels threatened. If the snake is



venomous, depending on the size of the victim, a bite may be life threatening if not treated in a timely manner. But in general, snakes do not waste their time attacking animals too large to be considered a meal.

Snakes are slimy. Snakes have smooth, dry skin composed of scales.

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