

Discourage Bandits from your Yard

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Raccoons are wonderful animals to watch, but can be quite destructive to your property and have the potential to carry a potentially fatal disease of humans. They dig in vegetable beds, eat fruit off trees and vines, knock down corn and break into bird feeders. They can also learn to enter your house through a cat or dog door. Knowing a little bit about the life and habits of this gregarious animal can help you protect your landscaping and produce from these masked marauders.



Nocturnal by nature, raccoons often go about their business of searching for food late evening, night and early morning. They are omnivores, meaning they eat a wide variety of foods, from fruit, vegetables, eggs and birds to insects, carrion, fish and other aquatic animals, pet food and garbage.

Adult male raccoons are widely ranging, traveling territories of 3 to 20 square miles. Females cover much smaller areas, usually about 1 to 6 square miles. Attracted to the abundance of food, water and shelter in urban and suburban residential areas, these masked mammals are often more plentiful than people think. Since they mostly come out at night, evidence of their passing is far more often seen than the animals themselves.

Raccoons den up in hollow trees, buildings, drain pipes, under decks, in brush piles and abandoned burrows. What can a homeowner faced with raccoon problems do to discourage these visitors? Scare tactics rarely work as raccoons quickly acclimate to their use. Trapping raccoons is not an effective deterrent, but is effective at removing a problem animal. For the average homeowner, unfamiliar with trapping raccoons, it is advisable to hire a professional wildlife control operator or in some counties you can contact the Agricultural Department and be put in contact with a wildlife service's trapper. The professional will have the proper equipment to accomplish the task will have the means to euthanize the animals, since releasing them elsewhere is prohibited by law.



Raccoons are cute but not cuddly, do not attempt to pet or pick up wild raccoons. Raccoons are also known to carry diseases, some of which are important for people and pets. One of these diseases people should be aware of is the raccoon roundworm, *Baylisascaris procyonis*. The roundworm is a parasite that resides in the small intestine of the raccoon. Although the adult worms are usually restricted to raccoons, the larvae (intermediate form) can infect a wide range of species. Adult female worms can produce millions of eggs each day which are subsequently shed in raccoon feces. Although the adult form of the worm is usually harmless to raccoons, the larval form can be devastating to many animals, including humans. There is no effective treatment once infected, therefore prevention is crucial to avoiding the devastating

effects of this disease. The disease is spread by feces so it is important to recognize raccoon latrines. Latrines are often located near denning or feeding sites, and are associated with structures such as the base of large trees, barn lofts, fallen logs, or even up in the crotch of trees. In suburban and urban areas, latrines are found in attics, on and under decks, at the base of chimneys, on rooftops, woodpiles, swing/play sets, in tree houses, along brick walls and on picnic tables. If raccoons are infected, large numbers of roundworm eggs can accumulate at latrines. Because the eggs can remain alive for years, these latrines can serve as long-term sources of infection for people and other animals. Homeowners should make periodic checks on the property for accumulations of raccoon feces, especially where small children play. Feeding raccoons should be discouraged, as raccoons often defecate near feeding areas. Try to think like a raccoon and look in areas that might be used by animals, such as large trees, woodpiles, decks, etc. If a latrine is found it should be removed with caution. Gloves, rubber boots, and coveralls should be worn when removing fecal material. The material should be placed in plastic bags and deposited in trash containers or incinerated. If the latrine is located on the ground, 2–3 inches of topsoil should also be removed. When a latrine must be removed from a confined area such as an attic or barn loft, a particle face mask should also be worn to avoid inhaling dust laden with eggs. Because the eggs are sticky, clothes worn during handling the fecal material should not be brought inside.

The following are suggestions for reducing temptations for raccoons in residential areas:

- Bring your pet food and water bowls inside at night.
- Net your fish pond, if it is small.
- Have tight-fitting trash can lids or wire the loose ones shut.
- Harvest your garden produce as soon as it is ready and pick up wind-fall fruit promptly.
- Block foundation vents.



Prevent entry into under-deck habitat with wooden latticework. Be careful not to trap animals already inside. If an animal is present, close up all but a 12" diameter opening, return at night, after the animal has left, and close completely. If a female has kits, the name for baby raccoons, you may need to wait until they have left their den (3-7 weeks after birth) to close the area safely. Trim tree branches back away from house and shed roofs. Use an electric "hot" wire around your fish pond, corn patch or berry vines. A 2-wire electric fence, with wires 5 and 10 inches above ground is most effective.

Please contact the [University of California Cooperative Extension](#) with your agricultural questions. To speak with a Certified Master Gardener: Calaveras (209) 754-2880, Tuolumne (209) 533-5912, Amador (209) 223-6838, El Dorado (530) 621-5512, South Lake Tahoe laketahoemg@ucanr.edu. Information for this article was collected from the University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources.