

Dealing with unwanted wildlife

Occasionally some animals may become unwanted. In today's article, I'll pass along suggestions on dealing with unwelcome wildlife from retired Extension Wildlife Biologist Dr. Jeff Jackson.

A scarecrow is a traditional tactic that may not always work. But no pets get accidentally injured; no residue runs off into nearby bodies of water. About the only thing that can go wrong is that your neighbors may laugh if they don't think it's working.

Jackson recommends putting the scarecrow into the garden before the animals get into the habit of going there and to keep changing it. Move it around the garden occasionally and add some motion to it. Hang strings from the arms and tie on some lightweight pie pans or something that will blow in the wind. Jackson adds that changing its dress also makes it more effective. There's nothing like a well-dressed scarecrow.

Scarecrows work on animals that can be alarmed by things they see such as deer and birds and are less likely to work on such animals as raccoons and squirrels. For the latter, try using an electric fence or cage trap. Cage traps are ideal for catching small animal pests. But you may catch the occasional cat.

Since raccoons are clever, attention to details is important. Make the bait the raccoon's easier choice for a meal. Put chunks of melon and some crumbled hamburger inside the trap. At the entrance place a paper towel used to wipe meat juices from a skillet. The juice will lure the critter to the door but it still leaves him hungry. Then tempt him by leaving a trail of hamburger tidbits to the main bait at the back of the trap.

To catch rabbits, place a box trap at the edge of your garden. Dry cob corn or an old apple is good bait. But Jackson explains, "Perhaps the best bait is a handful of fresh rabbit droppings. Rabbits will go to sniff them to see what other rabbit has been in there." If rabbits are a serious hindrance, a gardener's best bet is to fence the area with 30-inch wide strips of one-inch mesh chicken wire. It must be tight to the ground or rabbits will get under it.

For deer, Jackson suggests a single wire electric fence placed about 30 inches above the ground and baited with peanut butter. Mix peanut butter and vegetable oil in a 50-50 slurry. Treat the whole length of fence. Apply the mixture with a paint roller. Deer will smell the food, lick the wire and get shocked. Be sure and reapply bait every 2-4 weeks.

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