

Problems with raccoons



Raccoons are nocturnal, needing a quiet and dark place during the daytime. They den in tree cavities, underground burrows made by other animals, and human-made structures such as chimneys, basements, attics, spaces under patios and between walls. Their nesting season begins in February and can go through October. Weaning ends at 12 to 16 weeks. Adult raccoons are usually solitary, but young raccoons may stay with their mother during the winter, either in the same den or nearby.

Raccoons are attracted by pet food, ripe fruit and water. It is not good to feed raccoons, either intentionally or unintentionally. Don't leave pet food outside at night, keep ripe fruit picked, keep garbage cans securely covered or inside a garage at night. Raccoons are excellent climbers and are very dexterous.

Raccoons cannot be relocated. A territory left open by removing an animal will be quickly filled by another. It is also illegal in California to relocate animals or to raise them as pets.

Under house

Find the entrance, usually a loose vent cover. Wait until the raccoon comes out, and then securely close the hole. Make sure there are no babies still under the house. If there are babies under the house, leave the hole open and make the area unpleasant by lights and noise (with flashlight and radio). The mother will move her babies to another nest site and you can then safely close the hole. Sprinkle flour or cornstarch on the ground around the opening so you can more easily check for footprints to see if the raccoon has come out. The combination of lights and noise is very effective. Give it at least a week to work. It may take a couple of days for the mother to get annoyed, a couple of days to find a new home and some time to move the babies.

In attic

Find the entrance, usually a loose vent cover. Wait until the raccoon comes out, and then securely close the hole. Make sure there are no babies still in the attic. If there are babies in the attic, leave the hole open and make the area unpleasant by lights and noise. The mother will move her babies to another nest site and you can then safely close the hole. Sprinkle flour or cornstarch around the opening so you can more easily check for footprints to see if the raccoon has come out. Prevent access to the roof or attic by trimming overhanging branches or wrap metal guards at least 18" wide around trees or posts 5' above the ground.

Under deck

Screen the area under the deck using welded wire or other strong material. Leave one opening, and then close it securely after it comes out. Make sure there are no babies still under the deck. Sprinkle flour or cornstarch on the ground around the opening so you can more easily check for footprints to see if the raccoon has come out.

In tree

Raccoons sleep in the daytime. They will leave the tree at night.

Eating pet food

Don't leave pet food outside at night. Feed pets indoors or put food outside only during the daytime. Pet food should be stored indoors or in a secure metal container.

Coming into the house

Close the door. If coming through a pet door, close the pet door.

Getting into garbage can

Fasten garbage can lids securely. Rope or chain should work. To prevent toppling of the can, place the can in some kind of anchored rack or tie it to the fence. Keep the can in the garage. Use repellent on and around the can.

Digging in lawn

The raccoons are hunting for grubs and worms. Treat your lawn for grubs (insect larvae that eat grass roots) at the beginning of the summer so there will be no food available in late summer and fall when the raccoons are most likely to dig in lawns. Beneficial nematodes are a good non-toxic way to kill the grubs; see your nursery for advice. Raccoons will usually stop digging in lawns at the start of the rainy season.

- Sprinkle the lawn with finely ground black pepper or cayenne pepper.
- Use dog and cat repellent around the perimeter of the lawn and the perimeter of the yard to keep raccoons away from the lawn.
- Cover the lawn with welded wire so raccoons cannot dig into it. The lawn will grow up through the wire, and will become hidden very shortly. It's okay to mow over the wire.
- Make sure raccoons are not living on your property (under house, etc.).
- Use a light with a motion detector.
- Use a radio playing a talk show throughout the night.
- Use an infrared/motion detector-activated sprinkler to spray animals with water.
- Fence the yard with electric fencing.
- Water the lawn less to make the soil less soft and easy to dig in for food.

Eating produce from the garden

Fence the garden with a flimsy chicken wire fence that won't support the raccoon's weight. Install an electric fence. Keep ripe produce picked. Use dog and cat repellent around the perimeter of the garden.

Eating fish out of pond

Cover the pond with wire. This can be submerged, leaving the center open for the fish. Raccoons can't reach over the wire and will not stand on it because it is not stable. Install an electric fence around the pond. Use dog and cat repellent around the perimeter of the yard to keep the raccoon away from the pond. Provide rocks for fish to hide.

Large pile of feces

Raccoons will establish latrine areas and large quantities of feces can accumulate. Remove feces and at least a couple of inches of soil with a shovel. Wearing latex gloves, place it all in a double plastic bag, seal and dispose of it in your garbage. Wash your hands thoroughly. Raccoons can carry a roundworm that can be transmitted to people and pets. To prevent raccoons from using the latrine area, apply repellent on the area and place small bowls of ammonia around the perimeter.

Using ammonia as repellent

Soak cotton balls with ammonia, place cotton balls in small bowl. Don't block entrance with ammonia. Do not use if there are babies.

Using dog/cat repellent

Not all raccoons respond to repellent in the same way. Initially, use lots in a wide area.

Out during the day

If a raccoon is acting normally, it is probably OK. Sometimes raccoons don't make it back to their den before daylight. If a raccoon is acting abnormally or appears ill, call your local animal services.

There are a number of diseases and internal parasites associated with raccoons. The raccoon roundworm be spread to people by ingestion or inhalation of roundworm eggs from raccoon feces. Roundworm infection can cause serious disabilities, and young children are thought to be most susceptible. Raccoons can also catch rabies and distemper and can expose your pets to these diseases. Be sure your pets are properly vaccinated.

For Questions or assistance with Raccoon Problems

Contact Alameda County Vector Control Services District at (510) 567-6800 or www.avcsd.org