

Raccoon Facts

- Raccoons have adapted well to life in urban & rural areas. While raccoon families can be fun to watch, they can also come into conflict with property owners and residents.
- Raccoons are found in urban, rural, and wilderness areas in almost all parts of Ontario.
- As omnivores, raccoons feed on grubs, insects, small rodents and other small animals, eggs, fleshy fruit (like grapes), nuts and vegetables (like corn). They will also eat from garbage and composts.
- In Ontario, raccoons breed from January to April; gestation is eight weeks, whelping season is March to June; litter size averages three to five young, which are mobile at seven to eight weeks old and are weaned by late summer. The cubs may stay with the mother over the winter. Occasional late births may occur in mid-summer.
- Raccoons are mainly active at night, throughout the year. However, they may be dormant during periods of extended cold or in very deep snow conditions.
- Den sites include hollow trees, groundhog dens, chimneys, garages, under the inside sheds, attics, porches and under decks.
- Raccoons have amazing dexterity and use their front paws to pry things open, turn knobs and handle objects.
- Except during breeding season or when with young, raccoons are territorial and usually solitary.
- The animal's vocalizations include purrs, whimpers, snarls, growls, hisses, screams, and whinnies.

Problems and best solutions:

Lawn and garden

Raccoons are attracted to lawns and gardens, especially after a rainfall when grubs and larvae are near the surface. They dig small round holes and, in some cases, actually roll up large chunks of sod in order to eat the grubs. Grubs feed on the grass root system, destroying the grass.

Deterrent methods:

- Sprinkling pure soap flakes on the lawn and watering thoroughly
- Mixing bone meal in garden soil
- Sprinkling diluted Tabasco sauce over fruits and vegetables (wash before eating)
- Lighting up the area where raccoons are a problem. Use one 100 watt bulb for every 15 square meters of garden (50 ft by 50 ft.)

Garbage and composters

Garbage, compost and pet food can provide a real feast for raccoons, and once a free meal is found, they will return again and again. Since raccoons are very good at using their front paws, it is important to close down this potential wildlife café by:

- Storing garbage inside a garage, basement or bin until the morning of pick up.
- Sprinkling strong smelling repellents such as oil of mustard, naphtha flakes or ammonia in or around the composter and garbage.

- Installing lights around compost and garbage storage areas.
- Cleaning up after barbecuing – raccoons are attracted to grease drippings.
- Fitting garbage and composters with tight lids and securing them upright.
- Using enclosed-type composters only.
- Feeding pets indoors and not purposely feeding wildlife.

Homes, attics, chimneys and other raccoon residences:

Uncapped chimneys are an open invitation for raccoons, and so are loose shingles and openings in attics, roofs and eaves, garages and sheds. Raccoons can rip shingles off and chew holes in buildings. The area under decks and other structures may also be used by a determined raccoon. For ways to evict raccoons, try the suggestions for evicting skunks.

Although keeping these animals from getting into your home should be your first goal, the following approaches will help you evict them if they do get in, and will discourage them from re-entering.

Step 1: *If you think you know where the animals get in, check to see if this entrance is in use by:*

- Sprinkling flour in front of it and looking for footprints;
- Stuffing a rag or bunched up ball of paper in the opening and checking later to see if it was removed.

Step 2: *Encourage raccoons to leave on their own by making the home unlivable. Try these methods:*

- Sprinkling naphtha flakes around the area:
- Hanging ammonia-soaked rags:
- Playing a loud radio tuned to an all-talk station:
- Keeping the area brightly lit. **Important – make sure the light source is not a potential fire hazard.*

Do not attempt to smoke animals out of the chimney – they could be suffocated or burned.

Step 3: *Before any opening is closed off or any chimney is capped:*

- Check to see that all raccoons have moved out, especially between March and July when there may be babies;
- Make sure no animal is trapped inside a sealed area. It will starve to death, and you will be left with a smelly decomposing carcass.

Step 4: *When you are sure that all raccoons have left:*

- Secure the opening to prevent re-entry:
- Block all holes with galvanized sheet metal
- Repair siding and holes in buildings:
- Use heavy, rustproof screening to cover open air vents
- Cap chimneys securely:
- Trim overhanging tree branches:

- Remove unused TV towers:
- Leave behind a good dusting of naphtha flakes, ammonia or bleach to discourage the raccoons in their search for another opening back into their old den.

*Naphtha and ammonia have strong odours. When using anything that has an unpleasant odour or fumes to deter wildlife, it is important that you first check to make sure that the babies can move around on their own. Any animal exposed to fumes may become ill or die if they cannot escape.

In general, remember to keep doors and openings securely closed or locked to prevent raccoons from entering.

How should I clean up raccoon feces?

Material contaminated with raccoon feces should be removed carefully and burned or sent to a landfill. Care should be taken to avoid contaminating hands and clothes. The use of gloves and facemask will help prevent cross contamination. Treat decks, patios and other surfaces with boiling water.

Always wash hands well with soap and running water, to help further reduce possible infection.

If all else fails:

Live trapping:

When live trapping appears to be the only way to remove a problem raccoon, remember:

- Removal of nuisance wildlife is done by commercial wildlife removal companies. They should be consulted when the animal must be removed from between walls or other crawl spaces or when the home owner is unable to solve the problem without expert assistance.
- Remember, reducing or eliminating whatever attracts raccoons to your property is the only long term or permanent solution to your conflict with the animal.

Trapping, hunting and poisoning:

- Although trapping is a quick answer, it does not solve the problem. If one animal has found a way to get in, so will others. Trapping may also leave starving young behind to die, causing a bigger problem. Current Ministry of Natural Resources guidelines state that using body gripping traps or placing poison could result in criminal charges and/or provincial charges with fines up to \$5000.
- The firing of guns in residential areas or without proper licensing is illegal.
- Placing poison out to kill animals could result in criminal charges.

Rabies:

Although all warm blooded mammals can carry the rabies virus, raccoons are a major carrier of the disease in Ontario. To avoid human exposure to rabies:

- Vaccinate all dogs and cats, since there is always a chance of a pet coming in accidental contact with a rabid animal. Rabies vaccinations for dogs and cats are required by law.
- Stay away from all wild animals, especially if they appear tame, injured, or sick.
- Raccoons that show abnormal or sick behavior should be reported to the the Waterloo Regional Police at 519-570-3000.
- If you are bitten by any animal, wash the wound with soap and water, contact a doctor, and report the bite to the Regional Public Health Unit at 519-883-2000 and the By-law Enforcement Office at 519-634-8444. If possible have someone keep the animal in sight so that it can be captured or confined until picked up.

In Summary:

Many wild animals, especially raccoons, have adapted well to life in urban and residential areas. Because food and shelter are plentiful, and natural predators are limited, these animals will continue to live in our midst. By learning how to share the environment with them and reducing conflict by eliminating sources of food and shelter on our properties, we can be entertained by catching sight of these visitors as they make their way to a more suitable home.