

Woodchucks

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Woodchuck Damage Control

March and April and even May in the U.P. is the ideal time to control damage caused by woodchucks whether that damage is to suburban homes and gardens or to farm buildings and fields. Woodchucks (or ground hogs) are best controlled at these times because: 1) there is very little succulent green food and they are easily enticed into box traps; 2) the burrow entrances are easy to find because they are not concealed by vegetation; and 3) the woodchucks alive in spring are the breeding population that will produce many young woodchucks in June and July. A permit from the local DNR Conservation Officer is required to use kill trap to capture woodchucks or to fumigate their burrows. If you are live trapping with the purpose to relocate then no permit is required.

NOTE: Woodchuck damage control in urban and suburban neighborhoods and under buildings gassing methods would be too hazardous.

During late winter and early spring woodchucks are very easy to catch in large wire box traps (also called live-traps). These traps are the ones commonly available for purchase from pest control operators, hardware stores and farm supply stores such as TSC. Manufacturers of these traps are as follows:

National Live Trap Co., Route 1, Box 302 Tomahawk, WI 54487
Woodstream Corporation, Lititz, PA 17543
Allcock Manufacturing Co., Havahart, Box 551, Ossining, NY 10562

These traps, when baited with whole kernel corn, lettuce, carrot tops, or slices of apple, potato, carrot or banana, will quickly catch woodchucks during the months of March and April, and in Northern Michigan, May. However, once green vegetation becomes abundant in late April and May, these traps become much less effective. Woodchucks are difficult to catch after May with these traps. Trapping is also easier in March and April because vegetative growth does not conceal the burrow entrances, making them easier to find. Woodchucks caught in a box trap should be humanely destroyed. Releasing woodchucks on private property without the owners consent is *illegal*.

Leg-hold traps and body gripping killer traps may also be used, but should be used with caution in urban areas because of the hazards to children and household pets. (See section on rural woodchuck control for details). If the burrow does not extend under buildings, burrow gassing with commercial gas cartridges is appropriate in suburban areas (See section on rural woodchuck control for details).

Fencing

Woodchucks can be excluded from small garden plots using garden electric fences or chicken wire. Electric fences should be charged with a small charger appropriate and available for gardens. Use 2 wires: the outside wire should be 2 inches high and the inside wire (garden side) should be 4 inches high. Keep the wires weed free.

A chicken wire should be 1 inch mesh/4 feet wide. Attach to stakes in a C-shape with the open side away from the garden. The top of the C should overhang 6-8 inches and the bottom of the C should have 6-8 inches lying flat on the ground.

Controlling Woodchuck Damage in Rural Areas

Woodchuck damage in rural areas may be controlled by eliminating the woodchucks in one of 4 methods: trapping, burrow gassing, shooting and by dog.

1. Trapping - In addition to box traps, woodchucks can also be caught by leg hold traps or body gripping traps. If leg hold traps are used, match the size of the leg hold trap to the size of the woodchuck. For young woodchucks under 5 pounds use be trapped with a Number 1/2 trap, for 5-15 pound woodchucks use a Number 1 trap, and for very large woodchucks use a number 1 1/2 trap. If the trap is, too small the woodchuck will pull free; if it is too large the woodchuck is likely to break legs or toes and thus escape by twisting free or gnawing off the limb. Place the trap directly in front of the burrow and stake it down away from the burrow so that the woodchuck cannot get any part of its body into the burrow. If it is able to do so, it will be able to pull free of the trap. Woodchucks caught in these traps can be disposed of by clubbing or shooting.

Body gripping killer traps (Conibear traps) can be set directly around the opening of the burrow, so that the woodchuck or any other animal entering or leaving the burrow will be killed by the trap as it tries to pass through it Use a Conibear 120 for woodchucks under 10 pounds. Use a 160 or 220 to take larger woodchucks. A 330 may be necessary for very large woodchucks over 20 lbs. A permit from the DNR is required in order to set a Conibear 330 on land.

2. Burrow Gassing - Woodchucks may be gassed in their burrows by several gas producing compounds.
Unrestricted Materials:
 - a. Commercial gas cartridges-Some commercial gas cartridges are labeled for fumigation of woodchuck burrows and are commonly available in retail stores throughout Michigan. For details on use, see the U.S.D.A. Animal Damage Control (USDA-ADC) gas cartridge described below. Most commercial gas cartridges are not large enough for a normal size burrow. Tape at least 3 together before using them.
 - b. USDA-ADC Service gas cartridge-This special gas cartridge, manufactured by the USDA-ADC Service, is available to individuals and businesses for use in Michigan. To obtain this product, contact Doug Parr, USDA-ADC, 2043 W. Maple Rapids Street, St. Johns, MI 48879. The price is approximately \$38/100 plus about \$50 shipping charges. When using any gas cartridge, make preparations for sealing the burrow entrance prior to igniting and inserting the cartridge. Make sure all the smoke is contained in the burrow. After placing the cartridge, wait for 5-15 minutes and look for a plume of smoke emerging from a second

burrow entrance. Treat that entrance as well. When the weather is cool in early spring, apply the gas cartridge during the coolest part of the day, usually the morning or evening. When the weather is hot, apply the cartridges during the hottest part of the day, usually rain-day. Inspect every treated burrow within a week of treatment and re-treat any burrows that have been reopened. Retreatment is most effective if done during the night.

Restricted Materials:

- a. Calcium cyanide-Calcium cyanide, available from several sources in Michigan is manufactured by Degesch America Incorporated, Weyers Cove, VA 24486. Apply a rounded tablespoon of Calcium cyanide to each burrow opening. Seal the burrow entrance but make certain that the cyanide is not covered up and that the seal is -airtight. Inspect every treated burrow 1 week after treatment and retreat any burrows that have been reopened.
 - b. Aluminum phosphide (Phostoxin)-Phostoxin is also registered by Degesch for the control of burrowing rodents including woodchucks. Place 4 tablets down each woodchuck burrow entrance and seal with airtight materials. Inspect all treated burrows 1 week after treatment and re-treat any burrows that have been reopened.
3. Shooting - Persistent shooting is one very effective way to control woodchucks and if landowners can contact a rifle enthusiast who enjoys shooting woodchucks, they can be assured of continuing woodchuck control with no hazards to their property. Such hunters pride themselves on precise shooting at long distances.
 4. Pets - Most dogs of any large breed can be encouraged to kill woodchucks. German shepherds, Labrador retrievers, blue-tick hounds or any large mutt can be encouraged to hunt woodchucks by showing them the burrow entrances and encouraging them to chase woodchucks. With time and practice, they usually become proficient woodchuck killers that keep the farm virtually free of woodchuck problems.

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