

Opossum

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MSUE Ingham County July 2009

Opossum Control

Opossums are unique for several reasons. They are marsupials. The female carries her babies in a pouch on their belly. The babies live in this pouch from birth. The female will carry up to 13 babies and feed them from this pouch. Opossums have a prehensile tail, from which they can hang from tree branches. They are also well known for "playing possum" or faking death. This is a defensive tactic. Adult possums are about two feet long and weigh about ten pounds. They are omnivores, and they will eat almost anything, including other dead animals and garbage. Grubs are one of their favorite foods. Once they smell insect activity (crickets, ants, millipedes, grasshoppers, slugs, termites, boxelder bugs, bees, yellow jackets, earwigs, roaches, and pillbugs) they will begin to dig up the turf, pull back sod and overturn the mulch in flower beds to get to the insects. Opossums are slow, but excellent climbers. They have been known to scale bird feeders to get a meal. Fish in your small garden pond may come up missing all due to the eating habits of the opossum. They live in tree trunks, under brush piles, in rock piles, attics, and under sheds or decks and use old burrows for their home. They have very strong immune systems. Their life span is seldom more than three years and they are nocturnal.

Opossum phone calls usually involve one of these four complaints:

- (1) They have taken up residence under a porch or shed.
- (2) They are stealing garbage, pet food, or harassing my pets.
- (3) They have taken up residence in an attic, garage or gotten inside my home.
- (4) My backyard looks like someone has plowed up the sod.

Opossums leave a big mess in attics due to their large droppings. Opossums carry various parasites and diseases. They are not the cleanest of animals and they carry a strong odor. They will rip up insulation and chew on electrical wires if they get into your garage or attic.

Are Opossums Dangerous?

They look like a fierce giant rat. They have 50 sharp teeth, and sharp claws. They are not particularly aggressive, but like any wild animal, when cornered they will fight back to defend themselves. They do play "possum", but they will aggressively attack too. It is best to not let your pet go after one of them. They can carry parasites and disease via their droppings. They are not classified as a dangerous animal but don't corner them.

Getting Rid of Possums

If you are wondering how to get rid of opossums then you should be prepared because there is no magic spray or device that you can use to get rid of them. Predator urine (coyote or fox) does not work. Ultrasonic sound emitters are expensive and worthless at eliminating opossums. An old wives tale says, to use mothballs or ammonia soaked rags to make them leave their den these techniques fail. The one and only way to take care of your opossum problem is to trap and remove the animal. Opossums are very easy to catch. Just set a large cage trap, at least 10x12x32 in the area where the possums frequent. You can bait the trap with any number of baits (tuna, peanut butter, apples, corn, veggies, garbage, dog or cat food, etc.), because they are such opportunistic scavengers. Destroying the

trapped animal maybe your only option as there are laws against relocating these critters. The two main reasons against relocation are: (1) you are just causing a problem on someone else's property and (2) these animals carry diseases and you can be introducing a diseased animal into a healthy habitat. If you are not able to carry out the trapping and disposal of the opossum then you need to contact a critter removal expert and they will know what the laws are in your area and they will humanely dispose of the animal.

Information updated by Gary L. Heilig, Ingham Co. MSUE Horticulture Educator



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