

What to do about snakes

Although many people are afraid of snakes, most are nonpoisonous—and all try to avoid human contact altogether



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Snakes are extremely beneficial to their environments, helping to regulate rodent and rabbit populations. Despite a common fear of snakes among people, these animals pose little actual danger. Of approximately 128 species of snake in the U.S., only 20 species are considered venomous, and most bites from venomous snakes are nonlethal.

Solving conflicts with snakes

Snake in a yard or on porch/walkway

The first step to take when encountering a snake is to identify the species, which can be tricky since there are many “look-alikes.” (Most state wildlife agencies or extension offices have helpful identification resources online.). If the snake is not venomous, leave the snake be, and he will move along eventually, likely never to be seen again. Stomping 6 to 10 feet away from the snake, then retreating to give the snake space to leave, can help encourage the snake to move along.

If the snake is venomous, bring pets and children indoors. The snake does not need to be killed; he will likely leave on his own. After the snake is gone, remove attractants that draw in rodents by removing brush and woodpiles, sweeping up spilled birdseed under feeders, securing trash, fully enclosing compost and cleaning up clutter around the home.

Preventing conflicts with snakes

How to snake-proof your property

- Snakes usually enter buildings at ground level, some fitting through tiny cracks or holes no more than one-eighth-inch wide. Closely inspect the foundation for unsealed wire or pipe conduits or basement windows or doors that do not seal tightly. Seal these openings immediately.
- Inspect behind concrete porches, steps and where decks attach to the house. Close any openings found.
- Some snakes are also good climbers. Trees, shrubs, stone walls or chimneys may provide access to the roof. Be sure to check for openings around the eaves and roof.
- Reduce the chance of a snake moving into your yard by making it less attractive. Remove the following potential hiding places for both snakes and their prey:
 - Piles of rocks, wood or other debris
 - Tall grass and undergrowth
 - Cracks around concrete porches and sidewalks
 - Storage sheds with space under the floor
- Pet foods and household garbage left outside overnight attract rodents, which, in turn, may attract snakes.

Snake in a window well

Insert a slanted board or thick branch in the window well and then leave the area, giving the snake the opportunity to climb out on his own. After the snake is gone, make sure to cover the window well to keep animals out. If the snake seems unable to get out, you can use a branch or long tool to try and help move him up the side of the wall and out.

Snake in a home

Most snakes who find their way into homes are nonvenomous and belong to the rat snake “family” and are looking for mice, their primary prey, living inside. (And depending on where you live, the species might be Eastern rat snake, black rat snake, or gray, yellow, milk or corn snake.) Other snakes can accidentally get into a home, especially if the young are close by, through an open window without a screen, by entering through an opening in the foundation, or by happening to cross an open-door threshold.

It can be difficult to locate snakes after first seeing them in the house; they often seem to disappear. They can sometimes be drawn out by placing a heating pad (set on low) on the floor. Check from a distance every few hours to see whether the snake has been drawn to the heat. Once the snake is visible, slowly and quietly move toward the snake and place a tall, smooth-sided garbage can on its side next to him, then use a long broom to gently push the snake inside. (If the snake is small, a plastic bucket could be used, but the container needs to be taller than the snake is long.) Set the can upright and carry it outside to release the snake by tipping it on its side. If the snake was seen entering a hole, a cone-shaped “excluder” made of rolled-up fiberglass window screen or similar close-weave mesh can be placed over the hole and fastened with duct tape. The excluder should be at least 1½ feet long or more and come to a point approximately 1½ inches in diameter so the snake can slither out but not climb back in as the material will bunch up and prevent access. Leave the excluder on until either the snake is seen leaving or after signs of the snake’s presence have abated.

The only way to prevent recurrence is to realize that the snake probably followed a food source—most likely a rodent—indoors. Look around the house and seal openings, such as those found around washer/dryer connections, near pipe fittings under sinks and by holes in closets and behind the stove.



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Public health concerns

What to do if bitten by a snake

If a nonvenomous snake bites a human or companion animal, the wound should be treated like any other puncture wound that can get infected, and a physician or veterinarian should be contacted immediately.

If a venomous snake bites a human, immediately call 911 or transport the victim to the hospital. Instruct the victim to stay calm and inactive to slow the spread of the venom. Do not cut open the bite wound to bleed or suck out the venom. If possible, secure the snake for identification. If a venomous snake bites a companion animal, immediately transport the animal to the closest veterinary hospital. Keep the animal calm and inactive to slow the spread of the venom. Do not cut open the bite wound to bleed or suck out the venom. If possible, secure the snake for identification.

Visit [cdc.gov/niosh/topics/snakes](https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/snakes) to consult the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to determine whether the snake is venomous.



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Visit [humanesociety.org/snakes](https://www.humanesociety.org/snakes) for more information.