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# Preventing conflicts with coyotes

Coyotes generally avoid humans, even when their home range encompasses largely urban or suburban habitat. However, the presence of a free buffet in the form of pet food, compost or trash can lure coyotes into yards and create the impression that these places are bountiful feeding areas. Without the lure of food or other attractants, their visits will be brief and rare. But a coyote who finds food in one yard may learn to search for food in others.

## What attracts coyotes to urban and residential areas?

### Food

Deliberately feeding coyotes is a mistake. You may enjoy hand-feeding animals, but this is a surefire way to get them accustomed to people, and it will ultimately lead to their demise. Here are some general rules:

- Avoid feeding pets outside. If you must, feed them only once per day and remove the food bowl as soon as your pets have finished their meal.
- If you compost, use enclosed bins and never compost meat or fish scraps.
- Clean up spilled birdseed around feeders.
- Remove fallen fruit from the ground.
- Keep trash in high-quality containers with tight-fitting lids and place the cans curbside the morning of collection (instead of the night before).



### Shelter

People are often surprised to discover a coyote den near their property. This is no cause for alarm. It can be a lot of fun (and a great photo opportunity!) to watch a coyote family grow up.

In the spring, it is normal to see coyote pups romping and tumbling in the yard, playing like puppies. The play activity helps the pups prepare to go out on hunting trips with their parents. They will be accompanying their parents soon, and their use of the den and yard will only last a short while longer.



As cute as the pups are, do not feed them or initiate contact. Instead, they should be left alone so they don't lose their fear of humans. Orphaned pups are very rare, as both parents aid in the rearing of their young (unlike most other mammals, who are raised by the mother only).

### Free-roaming pets

Free-roaming pets, especially cats (and sometimes small dogs), may attract coyotes into neighborhoods. The best way to minimize risk to pets is to never leave them outside unattended. For cats, this means either keeping them indoors at all times or letting them outside only under your supervision, wearing a harness and leash or in a secure enclosure (such as a catio). Always walk dogs on a leash (6 feet or shorter), and attend to them when they're outside unless you have a "coyote-proof" fence (see next page). Additionally, avoid attracting coyotes to your yard by keeping pet food and water indoors.

## Community cat colonies

People who feed community cats are often concerned that coyotes might prey on the cats. These concerns are well-founded, as coyotes are attracted to both the outdoor pet food and the cats themselves as prey. Here are some general suggestions for keeping community cats safer:

- Feed cats only once per day and at a set time. Pick up any leftovers immediately.
- Elevate feeding stations beyond coyotes'—but not the cats'—reach.
- Give community cats escape routes (in the form of "cat posts") in places where trees and other climbing opportunities are scarce. These can be wooden posts (4-by-4 inches or corner posts) that stand out of the ground at least 10 to 12 feet and can be climbed by cats but not by coyotes.
- Discourage/harass coyotes seen on the property. Go after them aggressively, using the techniques described in our [coyote hazing guidelines](#). Making them feel uncomfortable encourages them to stay out of the area.



## Brazen coyote

Coyotes may lose their natural fear of people when they find free sources of human-associated food (e.g., pet food left outside) and have repeated contact with people with no negative consequences. You can teach an overly bold coyote to be wary of people with negative conditioning or "hazing." To do that, be big and scary: Raise your arms over your head, yell or blow a whistle, and bang metal pot tops together as you move toward the animal or spray the animal's hindquarters with a hose or water gun. Hazing works best if you keep the negative reinforcement going until you deter the animal from the property.

## Protecting dogs

Free-roaming or unattended small dogs may be viewed as prey by coyotes. The best way to protect smaller dogs at home is to never leave them alone in your yard unless you have a

"coyote-proof" fence. Coyote-proof fences are at least 8 feet tall (and made of a material that coyotes cannot climb) or at least 6 feet tall with a protective device on top, such as a "coyote roller" ([coyoteroller.com](http://coyoteroller.com)), that rolls off any coyotes who try to scramble over the fence. To prevent coyotes from digging under a fence, make sure the fence extends at least 12 inches underground or includes an L-shaped mesh apron that extends outward at least 18 inches and is secured with landscaping staples.

Attacks on larger dogs by coyotes are rarer, but they do sometimes occur when a coyote feels that a large dog is a threat to their mate or pups. This generally occurs during coyote breeding season (which takes place from January through March). In the spring, coyotes may also view larger dogs as a possible threat to their pups, especially if the dogs are off-leash. During these times, it is especially important to keep dogs on leashes (6 feet long or shorter) in public areas. Coyotes may follow (or "escort") a leashed dog passing by their den but will usually retreat after they realize the dog is just passing through and is not a threat.

