

What to do about woodchucks

Humane techniques for solving conflicts



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Woodchucks, also called groundhogs, gophers and even whistle-pigs, are shy, timid creatures—despite their burly looks. There is no reason to fear them—healthy woodchucks aren't interested in children or pets; their diet is 100% vegetarian. If chased, woodchucks will quickly flee to their burrows.

Suburbia provides their perfect habitat—our raised decks, stoops and sheds provide cover and a welcoming site to raise young, and our lush lawns and gardens provide a virtual buffet. Yet people and woodchucks can coexist for years without conflict. If you have a woodchuck burrow on your property and don't have any conflicts with its occupants, we say let it be.

Solving conflicts with woodchucks

Woodchuck burrowing under fence to access yard

When a woodchuck makes an appearance through a hole under a fence, it's likely that there are some tasty fruits or vegetables in the yard. The hole can be closed, but only after first confirming that the hole is a direct pass-through to the other side and not the entry to an underground burrow. It's also important to confirm that the woodchuck is not still in the yard before closing the hole. To close the hole:

- Loosely fill the hole with dirt mixed with either urine-soaked kitty litter or a capsaicin-based repellent (such as [Critter Ridder®](#)) to deter the woodchuck from trying to get through the hole again. Then, using a strip of wire screening or garden fencing material approximately 20 inches wide and the length of the affected fence, unroll the screening along the fence line. Secure the screening (along both the interior and exterior edges) tightly to the ground using landscaping staples (available at home improvement and/or gardening stores). If the woodchuck burrows under the fence from the neighbor's side, he will be surprised to find the screening blocking his exit on your side. The screening can be left uncovered or covered with dirt.

Evicting and excluding woodchucks

Timing

Before attempting to evict and exclude woodchucks, consider that breeding female woodchucks have dependent young in their burrows from late winter until spring or early summer, and evicting them during this time can be inhumane.

Females will resist abandoning their young, even under great duress. But wait too late in the year, when woodchucks put on weight and secure a suitable location to hibernate, and you will impede their winter survival. The best time to evict woodchucks from burrows is from midsummer to late summer, or between early July and late September in most areas.

If you watch closely, you may actually see the young woodchucks as they first venture above ground. If you do, you can begin your eviction about three weeks later with relative assurance that it will avoid affecting dependent offspring.

Closing burrows

Before closing the burrow, first test for activity by loosely plugging all the burrow entrances (there may be several) with grass clippings, newspaper or similar material and monitoring activity to determine if the burrow is currently vacant. If, after three to five days in clear summer weather, the material has not been disturbed, you can assume the burrow is unoccupied. Use heavy-gauge, welded fencing wire (with no larger than 3-inch squares) to close burrows:

- Cut the wire into 3-by-3-foot sections.
- Center a section over each burrow entrance.
- Bury the fencing at least 1 foot deep.
- Pin it down, if necessary, with landscape staples.

Woodchuck eating garden

Fencing

Woodchucks can be excluded from the garden by putting up a simple mesh fence. You will need a roll of 4-foot-high green garden mesh or chicken wire and some stakes. There are two secrets for making a successful fence:

- Tip No. 1: The top part of the fence only needs to be 3 feet high, but it should be staked so that it's wobbly—i.e., the mesh should not be pulled tight between the stakes. Instead, the mesh should have some “give” so when the woodchuck tries to climb the fence, it wobbles and discourages him from climbing higher. After climbing over the fence fails, he'll try to dig under it, so ...
- Tip No. 2: Extend the bottom portion 12 inches outward, away from the garden, in an L shape that creates a false bottom. (Put this mesh “flap” on top of the ground, but be sure to secure it firmly with landscaping staples; otherwise, the woodchuck will go under it.) When the woodchuck digs down and hits this mesh flap, he'll think he can't dig any farther and give up. It won't occur to him to stand back a foot and THEN start digging!
- Electric fences will work as well, and often a simple single strand of electrified wire set 4 inches above the ground is enough to discourage visits. If not, you can add one more strand about 9 inches from the ground. (Follow standard safety protocols when using electric fences.)

Scare devices and repellents

- Line the garden with helium-filled Mylar or “scare-eye” balloons (found on Amazon, the Bird-X website and most big-box stores). Attach them to weights and place them about about 3 feet off the ground. The bobbing balloons will scare the woodchucks.
- Put [Critter Ridder](#)® (a capsaicin-based repellent) or blood meal fertilizer around the garden's perimeter. Sprinkle cayenne pepper around plants, or spray a taste repellent such as [Liquid Fence All Animals Spray](#) on the plants as needed.
- Install a motion-activated sprinkler or air compressor near the primary burrow entrance or area that you want the woodchuck to avoid. The device will activate when the woodchuck moves near it.



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Woodchuck under deck/shed

In spring and summer, a burrow is most likely occupied by a mother nursing her young. After the young are old enough to leave the den, the family can be evicted by:

- Putting some [Critter Ridder](#)® granules (a capsaicin-based repellent available at most garden stores), urine-soaked kitty litter or sweaty, smelly gym shirts or socks into the woodchuck burrow.
- A product such as [Irri-tape](#) can also be placed around the burrow entries, hung 1 foot off the ground so it blows in the wind. Trim back vegetation and/or remove woodpiles that conceal burrows. Removing this natural cover will make animals feel more susceptible to predators and less comfortable in their den.
- Loosely fill the burrow with dirt. Continue to do so for as long as the woodchuck reopens it. Woodchucks can dig themselves out, but it is frustrating.

Once the animals are gone, protect decks or sheds using an L-shaped design, but make sure there are no animals trapped inside or babies left behind to starve.

Why not set a trap?

Trapping isn't likely to solve the problem. Even in studies where all the woodchucks were trapped out of an area, others from the surrounding area quickly moved into the vacated niche. In addition, trapping and relocating woodchucks often leaves behind babies who will starve on their own. It's much more effective to exclude woodchucks from where they're not wanted.

Visit humanesociety.org/woodchucks to learn more.