

PREPARING FOR WINTER PESTS

As winter approaches, we bundle ourselves in coats and seek warmth and shelter in our homes. Unfortunately, we're not the only ones. Various animals seek exactly the same thing. Some of them we want, and we can help them survive through the freezing temperatures. The other pests, we need to strongly discourage—which is a nice way of saying, “Get rid of them.”

Squirrels and Raccoons

As cute as they may seem and as funny as it is to watch their ingenious efforts to get at bird food or pet food, squirrels and raccoons are pests. In an attempt to shelter from the cold they take advantage of any space they can find in homes and storage buildings. These animals leave a trail of destruction when they move in, including torn insulation, chewed electric wires and unpleasant odors.

No Entry

Squirrels and raccoons enter structures by crawling along electrical cables and wires, jumping from nearby trees or poles and sneaking into holes in the walls, vents or chimneys. Trim any overhanging limbs and trees that are within jumping distance of the house (5–6 ft.). If you suspect they are getting in along a power, TV or telephone wire, have an electrical contractor place a slit piece of plastic PVC pipe (24 in.) over the wire. Don't try and do this yourself. When the squirrel or raccoon tries to cross, the pipe will rotate and the pest will lose its footing. Use a mesh screen to cover chimneys and crawl spaces. If a critter does get in there, it may not be able to get out on its own. Ask your local animal control agency to help you remove it, along with any nest-building materials.

Admission Reserved

The main idea is to convey the message that animals, which can't fly, are not welcome in your birds-only establishment. Pro-



vide ear or shelled corn at least 8 ft. away from a bird feeder (hanging 6 ft. above ground) to distract squirrels. You can also resort to the well-known baffle if your bird feeder is on a pole. Get one from your local retailer. Lubricating the pole with petroleum jelly or placing pipe over wires or ropes suspending feeders prevents the squirrels from getting good footing, as well. If you need to start going to extremes, animal-proof your post. This can be done by placing two-foot wide metal bands around them, about six feet off the ground.

To stop raccoons and squirrels scavenging for food, place birdseed or any other pet food in a covered metal trashcan that's fastened to a solid object. A latch to secure the lid is even better. If you clean your birdfeeder and make sure there aren't seeds scattered everywhere, the opportunistic animals will scavenge elsewhere.

A Mouse in Your House

Mice love to co-habit with humans in winter. These tricky little creatures don't only eat other animals' food, but ours too. Apart from creating panic and screeches in a calm household, mice also destroy structures and may transmit diseases, like *salmonellosis* (food poisoning).

Mice can easily gain access into your house. They are great climbers and can run up rough vertical surfaces and can jump 13 inches from the floor onto a flat surface. They can squeeze through an opening slightly larger than one fourth of an inch in diameter.



Each issue, *Green Profit* organizes a ready-made class on livegood and hardgood topics in the form of a magazine page you can tear out, even giving it to customers who want questions answered, myths debunked and a reason to be in a garden environment, regardless of the season. You provide the customers and example products; we'll do the rest.



Feed the Birds!

Some of our feathered friends don't migrate south for the winter and are grateful for any food you can offer them. There are two ways to attract birds to your garden: by growing plants that offer fruits, seeds and an ideal habitat; and through bird feeders and seeds. There are various feeders and an assortment of seeds on the market that will catch the attention of different birds to your garden.

Some common feeders are tube feeders, hopper feeders, tray feeders and suet feeders. Ask your local retailer for help choosing the feeder that will suit you. While you're there, find out what types of seeds are best for the feeder you chose, as well as which seeds will attract which birds. You have a wide range to choose from, including black oil sunflower seed, striped sunflower seed, hulled sunflower seed, safflower, millet, thistle (Nyjer) seed and nuts.

Feeding birds in winter is rewarding and it's fun to watch them use your yard as a playground as you enjoy the comfort of your living room. Watching squirrels get into your beloved birds' seed and seeing them swinging from the feeder is not rewarding though. It can provide a few laughs, but ultimately it's a nuisance you'd rather avoid. We'd all prefer to prevent the furry pests from invading our yards, as opposed to running out in the cold and attempting to chase the sly little creatures away. Their masked accomplices, raccoons, are just as bad. Both these critters aren't just after the birdseed; they're planning to move in this winter. Not if we can help it.

Vamouse

The first step to avoid these houseguests is sanitation. Make sure all spilled or unused food is cleaned up at night. Once again, make sure any bird and pet food is stored in heavy, tightly-sealed containers. Next, seal any openings around the house that are larger than a quarter of an inch with a suitable plug. Steel wool mixed with caulking compound is a good option. Any cracks in the foundations, as well as openings for water pipes, vents and utilities should be tightly sealed with metal or concrete.

To get rid of mice you need to reduce the population. This means trap them. Snap traps are popular control methods in homes and garages where there are only a few mice present. Ignore the cartoons, skip the cheese, and bait the traps with candy, peanut butter, dried fruit, nuts or gumdrops. Mice follow walls, so be sure to set the trap so it lies in their path. Live traps are also available, but then it's important for the mice to be released far away from any structure. Be careful when turning to poison as the answer. Poisoned mice can die anywhere, leaving an unpleasant, unidentified smell in your home. If you have pets, they could eat the poison or the mice themselves with devastating consequences. Mouse and rat poisons are usually toxic to humans and other wildlife; so only use them as a last resort.

Other Pests

Basically, all living things need a way to survive through the winter months. Some hibernate and migrate while others find a warm place to overwinter. Cracks and crevices are a major hotspot (excuse the pun), as well as woodpiles, sheds, debris and ground shrubs. All of these provide refuge for an assortment of wildlife. They range from those mentioned above to spiders, insects and crickets. The main things to remember this winter if you want to keep your garden and home pest free are: to seal up homes thoroughly from top to bottom; remove unnecessary debris and clean up and hide any possible food sources. ♣

By Kathy Goldfain, with help from the cooperative extension experts at Colorado State University and University of Illinois, as well as information found at www.Audubon.org.