

# Wild Things: Groundhogs

BY MARGARET BAIRD

As sure as Americans turn groundhogs into celebs every February 2, many of us will be quick to vilify these likable rodents just a few weeks later. Shadows or no, breeding season for groundhogs—also known as woodchucks or whistle-pigs—begins shortly after they arise from hibernation. That means well-rested, hungry groundhogs snacking on gardens or digging burrows under Joe Homeowner’s back porch.

But peaceful coexistence with these chubby chowhounds is possible. To make your garden—or that of an annoyed caller—a “hog-free zone,” try cheap harassment methods first. Groundhogs may steer clear of a garden that features spooky objects blowing in the wind, like tethered balloons or streams of shiny Mylar tape.

If the fear factor or the winds die down, corralling prized veggies and flowers within a simple fence is the next best option; chicken wire does the trick nicely. Erect the fence three or four feet high and allow plenty of give at the top. (Groundhogs aren’t brave climbers and will think twice about scaling a wobbly fence.) Prevent them from digging in by bending the bottom portion of the fence into an “L” shape and extending it about a

foot outwards. Pin it down with landscape staples to foil all comers.

If you *must* evict a groundhog from her territory, do it shortly after she’s emerged from hibernation, or wait her out until late summer. This will prevent any orphaning; by then, babies will be weaned and on their own. Dig out all the burrow entrances (there are usually a bunch) and clear away vegetation. Next, dump in clumps of the secret weapon: Urine-soaked cat litter. Groundhogs detest the strong odor (what overworked shelter staffer could blame them?) and should soon hit the road in search of more hospitable digs.

To ensure the burrow is empty, loosely pack the entrances with grass. It may take a few re-litterings before the groundhogs vacate for good, but if the grass remains undisturbed for five days, it’s safe to assume nobody’s home. And you can deter potential new tenants by closing the burrow permanently: Bury square sections of heavy gauge welded wire across all entrances, at least a foot deep. This may take some elbow grease, but it’s worth the effort. Other potential squatters sniffing around the site can detect the signs of a vacant burrow, but if they attempt to break and enter, the wire will deter them. **AS**



“Wild Things” addresses wildlife questions often fielded by shelters and animal control officers. For more tips on handling encounters with wild animals humanely, visit [humansociety.org/wildlife](http://humansociety.org/wildlife).

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