



Raccoons

Description and habitat

Raccoons are a familiar sight to most people, with their bushy ringed tail and black face mask. They can get to be quite large, and have been seen in Thornton up to 30 pounds. They walk flat on their feet like humans, and if you see their tracks, it includes an elongated hind foot and a hand-like forepaw. They will live pretty much anywhere, which could include your back yard.

Behaviors

Raccoons are nocturnal, and can be seen out and about from dusk to dawn. They will eat just about anything, and will stay close to a food source. It is true that they like to “wash” their food, and so they also like to have a water source nearby. They normally breed around February, have a gestation period of 63-65 days, and will have a litter of two to five babies born in April or May. The babies will start to leave the den at around eight weeks of age, and are weaned by 12 weeks.

Benefits

Raccoons will eat anything, which can be a positive benefit for homeowners. They will eat dead animals, and also mice and insects. They are also extremely intelligent, and can be a great source of entertainment if you are fortunate enough to be able to observe them.

Common Problems and Solutions

Raccoons in the chimney

You can try placing a bowl of ammonia in the fireplace, and if needed leave the flue cracked open. Most flues are not airtight, so this may not be necessary. You can also try putting a radio in the fireplace set on a talk show. Give the raccoon a couple of nights to move out. If there are babies in there, the mother may take a few days to get this accomplished. **DO NOT** set a fire to get the animals out. This will only burn and/or kill the animal, and will provide more of a problem for the homeowner. If the flue is a smooth material like metal, you may have to hang something down from the top of the chimney. A rope tied in knots would work, as long

as there is something for the raccoon to grasp on to. Make sure the rope is securely fastened at the top, and goes all the way to the bottom. Once the raccoons have moved out, make sure you screen or cap your chimney.

Raccoons in the attic

It is possible to scare them out using various tactics. A simple solution is to make noise in the attic area and shine lights up there. You can place a radio in the space set on a talk show or loud rock. Rags tied in knots and soaked in ammonia can be placed up there as long as it is a fairly enclosed space. Give the raccoons a couple of days to move out, then repair their entrance/exit hole using hardware cloth or wire mesh. As an extra precaution against them trying to chew their way back in you can sprinkle the area with cayenne pepper.

Raccoons in the yard/garden/fish pond

Light the area with floodlights or motion detector lights. You can also try one of the various repellants on the market designed to keep animals away such as Repel, or for small areas try sprinkling cayenne pepper. For small ponds, a barrier method such as a cover works best and would need to be used at night. Keep all pet food inside, or at least pick it up and put it inside at night. Keep all garbage lids tightly closed, and use a bungee cord or other device to prevent the raccoon from getting inside.

