

Living with Raccoons

Raccoons are found in all types of habitats. They generally prefer riparian or wetland regions, though. Over the past decade, raccoons have become more comfortable living near human communities, and do not fear people like most wildlife. In fact, they can be pretty bold.

A raccoon usually has one litter per year, and its mating season is from March to May. Occasionally, though, the season can be prolonged through July. The gestation period is typically 63 days, and litters average from two to seven babies. Nocturnal animals, raccoons ravage properties at night, looking for insects, fruits, vegetables, acorns, seeds, fish and small mammals, however it is not unusual to see them out during the day feeding. They are seasonal eaters and prefer fish, crayfish, and small mammals in the spring. During the other seasons, they feed upon acorns, seeds, fruits, vegetables, insects, and other invertebrates.

The raccoon is, of course, easily distinguishable by its black-masked face and ringed tail. Raccoons have a husky build and usually weigh between 15 and 40 pounds. Its coat is full and shaggy and its coloring is gray with shading of tan on its flanks. The heavily furred tail is usually a tan and gray with black rings. Their long slender toes on the front feet give raccoons great dexterity in grasping food, and the larger surfaces on the back feet give it superb agility in climbing for food.

Raccoons have earned their infamous nickname, Bandit, first given to them because of their black-masked face. But, you have to remember that we have virtually forced them into the title. Raccoons live just about everywhere in the wild. Urbanization and land development have taken a majority of these natural romping grounds away from the raccoon and rather than diminish, these hardy critters decided to adapt and flourish. So, we have problems with them claiming back "our" space for their own. Consequently, raccoons topple garbage cans, nest in attics, roll back lawns for food, prey upon pond life, and are even intrepid enough to come into our homes.

How can you discourage this behavior from occurring on your property?

- **Fasten garbage can lids tightly.** Their nimble front feet can make this a difficult task, but some rope or chain should do the trick. To prevent toppled trash cans, place your garbage can in some type of anchored rack, or tie it to the fence.
- **On a pond,** submerge horizontally, a wire mesh around the circumference of the pond. Stretch the mesh, leaving the inside free. This way the fish have the center of the pond open and the raccoon can't reach over the wire and because it is unstable they tend to not stand on it.
- **Metal guards,** 18 inches or wider, wrapped around trees five or six feet above the ground will deprive raccoons access to roof tops and other buildings.
- **Sprinkle your lawn or planters with cayenne pepper** to discourage a raccoon from grub hunting. Grubs are tiny, worm-like bugs that live in your lawn.
- **Pick up the family pet's dinner bowl** if they dine outdoors. And, lock pet doors at night to keep raccoons out of the kitchen or garage.
- **Live, humane trapping** is also an alternative to ridding your home, property and yard of raccoons. However, because they are around in such numbers, trapping is only a temporary solution. It won't be long before another one is attracted to your home. Raccoons are furbearers and are protected by law. This law varies from state to state and it is your responsibility to know it.