

News Column for Use Week of 3/7/2022
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Dealing with Snakes around the Home

The weather is warming and the plants and animals are responding accordingly. Soon even reptiles and amphibians will be on the move including unfairly feared snakes.

Before dealing with a snake in your yard or garden, first, consider its many benefits. Snakes are one of nature's most efficient mousetraps. While snakes will not eliminate rodent pests, they help keep their numbers in check.

Most snakes we encounter are quite safe as nonpoisonous snakes far outnumber the poisonous kinds, both in the number of species and individuals. In Kansas, there are five poisonous species and 33 nonpoisonous species. It is important however to learn to identify poisonous snakes. The best way to identify a poisonous snake is to know all of the venomous snakes of your locality by sight. Color and patterns are distinctive and easily learned.

Control Measures

- The most effective and lasting method for reducing snake numbers is to make the area unattractive to them. Do this by removing hiding places such as old boards, debris, high grass, or weeds. These measures will also reduce the food supply of insects and rodents making the environment less attractive. Look at the surroundings as if you were a snake. Are there rodents or insects available for food? Are there places to rest, breed, and carry out other necessary living functions? If you answered yes, plan to remove food and cover.
- Snakes enter buildings in search of cool, damp, dark areas or places where rodents and insects abound. To exclude them from your home: • check the home for openings 1/4 inch or larger. • Plug cracks and crevices and use screens at windows and doors. • Inspect the masonry of foundations, fireplaces, and chimneys and coat with cement, if necessary. • Plug spaces around pipes passing through outside walls. • Place galvanized screen over drains or ventilators. • Fill gaps between the outer walls and foundation.

Removing Snakes

- Homeowners occasionally encounter a snake inside the home, usually in a basement or crawl space. Snakes are attracted to these areas by the warmth on cold days and the cool shade on hot days. If a snake is inside, it should be identified, caught, and released. If you don't fear snakes, the best way to remove them is to sweep them into a bucket or large garbage can with a broom. Capture tongs can also be used to safely pick snakes off the ground and move them.
- Glue boards can be used to immobilize and remove snakes. Attach three or four rat-sized glue boards to a piece of plywood or staple four boards together. Place them along a wall or foundation. When the snake moves across the glue boards, it will become firmly attached and can be removed. To release the snake, pour vegetable oil over the snake and boards, inactivating the glue.

For help identifying a snake, send a picture to your local extension office or a local wildlife/pest management specialist.

NOTE: Exercise caution when moving in a crawl space, especially if venomous snakes have been in the area. A face bite could be very serious, and even an encounter with some nonpoisonous snakes can be unpleasant.

WARNING: If you choose to kill or find a dead snake, reflex actions can cause an apparently "dead" snake to bite, so do not handle "dead" snakes with your hands; use a stick.

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

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