

Foolproof steps for a wildlife-proof backyard

Those pesky varmints have been living and eating with you for free. What do you get in return? Parasites and a whole lot of headaches. Here's how to keep wildlife at bay.

Before we start wildlife-proofing, it's important to know that wildlife are not pets and should not be treated as domesticated animals. I know they're cute. Don't do it. If you see a sick or injured wild animal, don't approach it; instead call your local or state wildlife agency office. Also avoid wildlife that appears "tame"—these animals are potentially diseased. Now let's get started.

Ditch your curb appeal

The most important steps you can take to limit wildlife in your yard are the ones that make your property unattractive to wild animals. Start by limiting available food. Specifically, don't leave pet food outside that can draw wild animals.

Evict those rent-free rodents

For those who have livestock, including horses, keep feed covered in a shelter within a rodent-proof container like

a metal trash can to keep out wildlife. Wild animals may also look to use areas of your house for nesting or food caches—without paying rent—which is just rude.

Identifying and repairing outside access to attics, crawlspaces or other areas will dissuade wild animals from trying to live rent-free in your house. Pest removal companies also can inspect and make specific suggestions to minimize wildlife access.

It's also a good idea to keep compost areas covered and, if you feed birds, remove excess feed from the ground that may attract the wildlife you're not hoping for.

Give parasites the boot

Finally, to minimize the incursion of ticks, mites or fleas that may hitch rides on wild animals, keep grass cut short, remove excess leaf litter and use year-round flea and tick repellent on all pets. Keeping cats indoors will greatly reduce their chances of acquiring various infectious diseases, some of which are also infectious to people.

