

Just some helpful tips due to the large amount of snake sightings

With a drier and hotter start to summer this year, more snakes are following their prey into areas that are irrigated and provide good cover and food. Unfortunately, this describes many people's yards, and for a lot of people, the sight of a snake strikes fear. To further the problem, many companies take advantage of people's fear of snakes by selling products or services that are ineffective, and in some cases, may increase the danger to people and pets.

Most people's fear of snakes stems from the worry that they are venomous. Most won't want to be close enough to tell, but venomous snakes have a pupil that resembles a cat's. It has an oblong shape with peaked ends that look like a slit in the center of the eye. Non-venomous snakes usually have round pupils. The snakes most people are likely to see in their yards will be non-venomous, such as the garter or gopher snake.

If you encounter a snake in or around your home, keep calm and follow these tips.

Mow grass often and keep it fairly short. Snakes are less likely to reside and move through short grass because it increases their exposure to predators such as owls and hawks. Shorter grass also makes snakes easier to spot.

Avoid over watering your lawn. Too much landscape water may attract prey species such as worms, slugs and frogs, which in turn may attract snakes seeking a meal.

Keep trees and shrubs trimmed and away from your home and garage, and keep branches off the ground. Creating a 24-to-36-inch space under trees and shrubs will help keep snakes away and will make it easier to spot them if they do slither in.

If you feed birds, keep the feeder away from the house or consider not feeding them. Birds are messy eaters and often leave seed scattered below the feeder. Seed on the ground attracts rodents, which may also attract snakes seeking a meal. Store bird seed in a metal can with a tight-fitting lid.

Feed pets inside. Feeding them outside can attract insects and rodents which, again, attract snakes. If feeding outside is necessary, be sure to clean up uneaten food promptly. Store pet food in a metal can with a tight-fitting lid.

Store firewood, excess lumber and other types of debris away from your home. These provide perfect places for snakes to hide.

Think before you landscape. Avoid using mulch and large rocks in your landscape, as they

attract snakes and their prey and can create breeding and overwintering habitat. Instead, use smaller, tight-fitting rock such as gravel or river rock. Also avoid landscaping with water gardens and Koi ponds.

Seal cracks and crevices on sidewalks and foundations, and consider getting an energy audit. These can be a great way to identify places that allow air conditioning and heat to escape the home. These same cracks and crevices may be used as an entry point by snakes and other small creatures.

When all else fails, consider fencing. Use 1/4 inch or smaller rigid mesh or solid sheeting and bury it a few inches into the ground. Include a bend at the top to prevent snakes from climbing up and over.

Do not use snake repellents or sulfur, as they are ineffective. Do not use mothballs because the active ingredient is naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene – chemicals that are toxic to insects and mammals, but are not effective against snakes. Using mothballs outside your home also violates product labels and puts your family and pets at risk. Do not use sticky traps outside. Traps placed outside capture all sorts of non-target animals and result in a slow, agonizing death.

Information obtained from Terry Messmer, Utah State University Extension wildlife specialist

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