

to entice the opossum, and lower the bucket into the window well. Place the bucket on its side so that the opossum is able to walk inside. Once the opossum is inside, slowly raise the bucket to



ground level and place the bucket on its side with the opening away from you so that the opossum can walk out. Try to stay out of the opossum's sight.

### **ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS...**

- As a last resort, trapping can be an effective method of dealing with troublesome wildlife. The most commonly used device is a live-trap which captures the animal physically unharmed. Traps should be checked twice a day (morning and evening) to replenish bait or to humanely deal with captured animals. Raccoons, opossums, and skunks cannot be released off-site, they must be euthanized or released on the same property. Contact the ODNR Division of Wildlife (1-800-Wildlife) for additional trapping regulations.
- Do not use poisons. Poisons are illegal, inhumane and may result in secondary poisoning of raptors, wild scavengers and neighborhood pets.
- Native wildlife are legally protected. It is illegal for anyone to possess a native wild animal unless permitted by the ODNR Division of Wildlife. Wildlife rehabilitators have a permit to care for orphaned or injured wildlife

### **PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNS**

Opossums have a lower body temperature than most mammals, which makes them fairly resistant to many diseases. Historically, rabies is very rare in opossums, and there have been no confirmed cases of rabid opossums in Miami County.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

*If you find a wild animal and are concerned, leave it alone and call Brukner Nature Center at 937-698-6493, seven days a week, 24 hours a day.*



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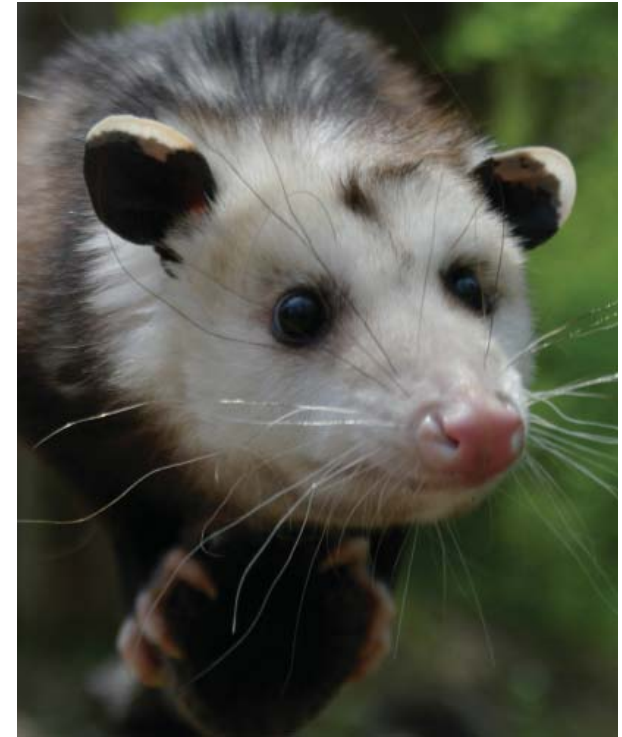
[www.bruknernaturecenter.com](http://www.bruknernaturecenter.com)

*Brukner Nature Center is a non-profit, privately funded organization promoting the appreciation and understanding of wildlife conservation through preservation, education, and rehabilitation.*

*The purpose of our wildlife rehabilitation program is to educate people regarding the natural history of Ohio's wildlife, to offer help and advice when wildlife and people conflict, and to care for, rehabilitate, and release native Ohio wildlife expected to survive in their natural environment.*

# Living with VIRGINIA OPOSSUMS

## in Miami County



# Brukner Nature Center

The Virginia opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*) is the only marsupial found in North America. Marsupials reproduce in a unique manner. The young are born in an embryonic form and make their way into a pouch, or marsupium, where they are nourished. At approximately 80 days of age, the young may leave the pouch for short periods of time, clinging to their mother's side and back.



Young opossums are on their own when they are 8 to 9 inches in length from their nose to the base of their tail – approximately the length of a dollar bill. Opossums are nocturnal and live a mostly solitary life. They are not aggressive, and a common means of defense is faking death or “playing possum.” When frightened, they may show their teeth and hiss.

## LIVING WITH OPOSSUMS

Opossums prefer to live in wooded areas by streams; however, cities and suburbs may provide adequate food and shelter. Common den and resting sites include abandoned woodchuck burrows, hollow logs,

and wood or brush piles. Openings under buildings, elevated sheds, concrete slabs and porches, and crawl spaces under houses all act



as den locations as well. Inside the cavity, a nest is made of leaves and grass. Opossums are capable climbers and may take shelter by day in trees or old squirrel nests. Opossums are nomadic creatures and most only use homes temporarily.

## PREVENTING PROBLEMS

- Do not encourage opossums by feeding them.
- Keep pet food and water dishes inside, especially at night.
- Do not allow seeds to accumulate under bird feeders.
- Keep grills and barbecues clean. Even small food scraps attract opossums with their keen sense of smell.

If possible, do not keep garbage cans outside. Use welded wire to prevent animals from accessing openings under decks, elevated sheds, concrete slabs and porches.

## RECOMMENDED DETERRENTS

### Den Sites

- Place lighting, such as bright flashlights, flood lamps or blinking strands of holiday lights, in the den. It is best to leave the lights on 24hrs a day. If this is not possible, the lights must be on during the daytime to disturb the animal's sleep.
- Play the radio, portable alarm clock, noisy children's toy or anything that makes noise repeatedly either in or near the den. It is best to have the sound on for 24 hours a day. If this is not possible, the sound must be on during the daytime to disturb the animal's sleep.
- Opossums are very scent-oriented mammals. Placing ammonia soaked rags in or around the den will create an irritating smell that will dissipate over time. You will need to either re-soak rags every 24-48 hours or create a wicking set up (baby food jar, coffee can, etc. with a rag to act as a wick).

It is important to use all techniques at the same time in order for the deterrents to be successful. To determine if the animal has left the den site, wad up newspaper and pack it into the den entrance. This also helps to hold in ammonia fumes. If the opossum is still using the den, the newspaper will be pulled out. If after a few days the newspaper has not been disturbed, securely repair any access openings. *Failure to do so may result in the opossum or another animal moving back in.*

## RAIDING YOUR GARBAGE CANS

The simplest way to keep opossums out of your garbage cans is to bring the cans inside where opossums cannot reach them. If this is not possible, pour one cup of ammonia inside the can, or sprinkle black pepper on the top bag inside the can. Another deterrent is to place rags soaked in ammonia on top of the lid and to secure the lids with bungee cords. Use these techniques for a five to seven day period or when putting out the garbage for pick up.

## GARDENS

Exclusion is the best technique. Build a 4 ft. high chicken-wire fence around the garden, leaving the top 12 to 18 inches unattached to any support and bent outward. The opossum's weight will pull the fence downward, landing it right back where it started.



Taste deterrents also work; however, they need to be reapplied after a soaking rain. Recommended deterrents include: spraying a mixture of one gallon of water and two tablespoons of hot sauce onto the plant, spraying garlic puree onto the plant, or sprinkling baby powder on the plant. You may wish to visit a nursery or home center for commercial products.

## OPOSSUMS IN A WINDOW WELL

*Method One* – Place a rough board at a 45 degree angle into the window well. Make sure the board is long enough to act as a ramp to the top. If you do not have a rough board, wrap a towel or carpeting around the board to provide traction for the opossum. Opossums are nocturnal (active at night) and may not leave the window well until night. Enticing foods such as fish-scented cat food, cheese, etc. can be used to further entice the opossum from the window well.

*Method Two* – Attach a string or rope to a five gallon bucket handle. Place food inside the bucket