



Woodchucks

(*Marmota monax*)



Understanding the habits and habitats of wildlife, and taking appropriate measures to prevent unwanted encounters, will help everyone to continue to enjoy the wonderful wild resources that still exist in New Jersey.

Getting to Know Woodchucks

Woodchucks, also known as groundhogs or whistle pigs, are harmless, comical vegetarians who are commonly seen in suburban backyards and along roadways. Conflicts usually arise over who gets to eat the garden vegetables! Suburban landscapes provide the perfect habitat for woodchucks. Our raised decks provide cover and a perfect place to raise young, and our lush lawns provide a virtual buffet. Most woodchuck conflicts occur in spring and summer, just when birthing season has begun. That is why problems need to be solved in a way that does not leave orphaned young behind.

Safety Concerns

Woodchucks are harmless vegetarians who flee when scared. Remember that even a small child looks like a giant predator to the woodchuck. There is no cause for alarm, healthy woodchucks simply don't attack children or pets. If chased, woodchucks will quickly flee to their burrows.

Woodchucks have a higher susceptibility to rabies than other rodents, yet the incidence of rabies in woodchucks is still very low. Woodchucks are much more susceptible to the roundworm brain parasite, which causes symptoms that look exactly like rabies. Roundworm is not airborne it can only be transmitted by ingesting an infected animal's feces.

Keeping Them Out of Your Garden

The best way to exclude woodchucks from your garden is to put up a simple chicken wire or mesh fence. All you need is a roll of 4-foot high chicken wire and some wooden stakes.

This fence should:

- **Be wobbly:** The top portion of the fence only needs to be 2-1/2 to 3 feet high but it should be staked loosely so that it has some "give" and wobbles. This will discourage the woodchuck from climbing the fence. The woodchuck will try digging under the fence instead, bringing us to the second fence requirement:
- **Extend beneath the ground:** Extend your mesh fence 4 inches straight down into the ground, then bend it and extend it another 8-12 inches outward, away from the garden as shown in the diagram below. This "L" shape creates a false bottom that will deter the woodchuck from digging beneath the fence. You can also put this L-shaped flap on top of the ground, but be sure to secure it firmly with landscaping staples or the woodchuck will go under it.

If you do not want to put up a fence, try these deterrents:

- **Blood meal fertilizer:** Put blood meal fertilizer around the perimeter of your garden.
- **Cayenne pepper:** Sprinkle cayenne pepper around the plants, and spray the plants themselves with a taste repellent such as Ropel every two weeks. You can find Ropel™ and other taste repellents at your local garden store.

Evicting Them From:

- **Under a deck or shed:** Woodchucks do not undermine foundations and really are not likely to damage your shed. In spring and summer, the woodchuck under your deck or shed is probably a mother nursing her young, which is why we encourage you to consider leaving them alone. Be sure you really need to



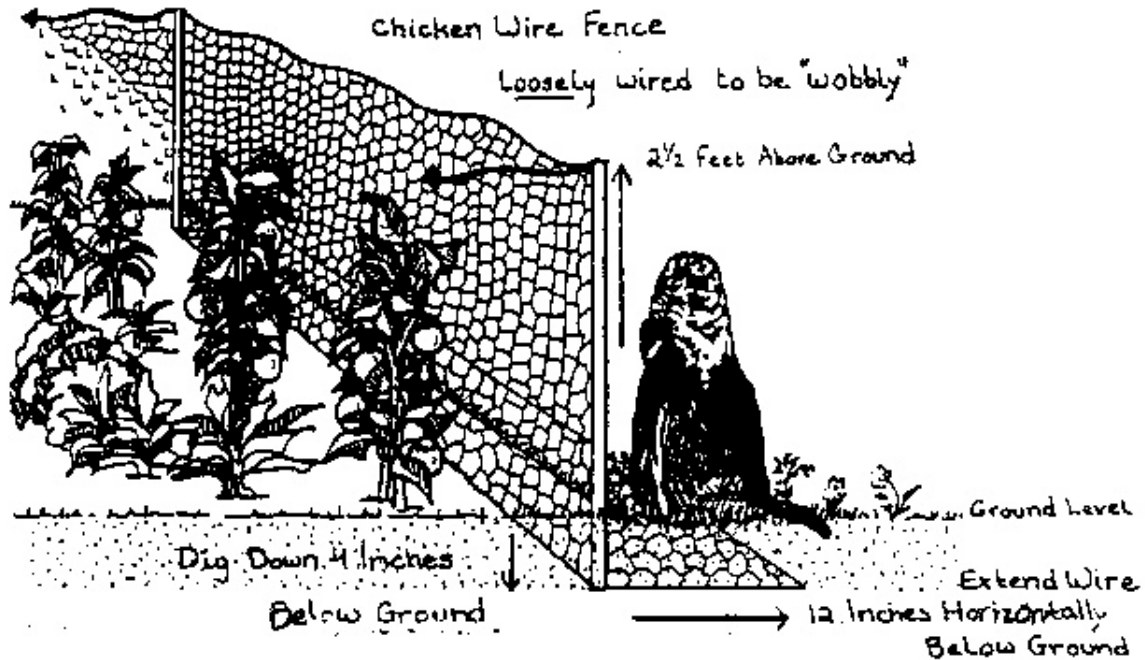
About Mercer County Wildlife Center

The Mercer County Wildlife Center is a state and federally licensed facility that cares for injured, ill and displaced wildlife. The Center provides these animals with the medical treatment and a temporary refuge before releasing them back into an appropriate wild habitat.

For more information regarding the work we do and the animals who share our environment, including a series of printable brochures that provide tips for coexisting peacefully with those animals, visit us online at:

www.mercercounty.org/departments/mercer-county-park-commission/wildlife-center

For information on protecting bee hives and livestock, contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife Wildlife Control Unit at (908) 735-8793.



evict the woodchuck before taking action. If you must, put some dirty kitty litter down the woodchuck burrow, the urinated part acts as a predator odor, which often causes the entire family to leave. Or try an LED flashlight shining into the burrow 24/7. A battery operated radio at the burrow entrance 24/7 is also encouragement to relocate.

What About Humane Traps?

Trapping will not solve the problem. If you have a woodchuck in your yard, you have a good woodchuck habitat. If you eliminate one, another will quickly move into its place. Relocating a woodchuck may cause its death or if trapped between May and August, the death of the young that may be left behind.

In addition, it is against the law in New Jersey to trap and relocate wildlife. It is better to learn to accept woodchucks that inhabit your yard and use the measures outlined in this fact sheet to minimize the damage to your gardens.



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Dan Benson, County Executive

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