

Snake Proof Your Home

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Landowners often ask wildlife biologists in Alabama how to attract wildlife to their property or homes. Land is often managed with deer and turkey in mind; around our homes, songbirds are popular to attract. However, it would be rare indeed – and a pleasant surprise – for someone to call inquiring about methods to attract snakes to their back yards.

Snakes are a component of Alabama's diverse wildlife. Approximately 50 species of snakes occur throughout the state. A few commonly encountered snakes around homes include the harmless black racer, garter snake and rat snake. The odds of encountering a venomous snake are much less, as only six species of snakes in Alabama are venomous.

Homeowners are often alarmed when spotting a snake around their home after years of never seeing one. This apparent absence of snakes is most likely due to the secretive nature of the animals. In addition, some of the snakes around our homes are very small. Red-bellied snakes, brown snakes, and earth snakes are small (typically less than one foot long), very slender, and spend their time in search of food amongst the leaf litter and loose soil. Unless raking or gardening, these snakes go unnoticed.

No snake is a vegetarian. Snakes eat other animals and the size of the snake determines the size of the prey. Small snakes eat insects or other invertebrates while the large snakes eat birds and mammals. Unless your house is a haven for bugs or mice, there is no food in your house to attract snakes. The appearance of a snake inside your house is likely a random occurrence. While crawling about, a snake encountering an outside wall typically follows the wall and may enter your home through an open outside door or even under the door. Small snakes can crawl under or through what appears to us as an impassable gap. A good winterizing check of all the weather sealing around your doors and windows will go a long way in preventing snakes from crawling inside. Besides, it will save on your heating and cooling bills as well.


To eliminate an unwanted guest, a broom will often suffice in sweeping a small snake out the door. For larger snakes, get a closed cardboard box with a small opening cut on one

side. Place the box near the animal and corral the snake toward the entrance you made. The snake will often crawl toward and into the dark confines of the box. Simply remove the box to the outside after the snake enters.

Snakes are reclusive by nature and seek available hiding places. Shrubbery, woodpiles and thick plantings around the outside of your home will give the opportunity for snakes to stay hidden right outside your door. In fact, the best deterrent in combating snakes in and around your house is to keep a neat, trim yard and reduce the landscaping next to your house. Of course, the drawback is that you will eliminate much habitat for songbirds and other small reptiles and amphibians we all enjoy around our properties.

UNFOUNDED FEAR

There is much unfounded fear of death or injury with venomous snakes, so it is good to keep things in perspective. Statistics compiled by the National Safety Council reveal that in 2006 eight people died from contact with venomous snakes or lizards. However, in that same year, 413 drowned while in or falling into bathtubs and over 14,000 died as occupants of vehicles. Further investigation would likely reveal that some if not all of the deaths from venomous snakes or lizards resulted from the animals being handled or otherwise harassed by the victim.

Unless your home is in the middle of a paved parking lot that is surrounded by an impenetrable snake-proof fence, you will eventually encounter a snake or two over time. No need to be alarmed, as almost all of the snake encounters in and around our homes are harmless beneficial species. In fact, the presence of a snake or two is likely an indication that your property is being managed to support a healthy and varied population of wildlife right in your back yard. 



Corn Snake



Homeowner Tips

Here are some things you can do to reduce the chance of encountering a snake in your yard.

- Remove old lumber or junk piles.
- Trim shrubs near the home's foundation.
- Keep tall grass mowed in yard and around fences.
- Make sure pond banks are clear of weeds and debris.
- Eliminate any rodent problems in basements and attics.
- Don't leave pet food outside; it may attract rodents, which could attract snakes.
- Seal holes around windows and doors.
- Stack firewood away from home on a raised rack.



Rat Snake

Green Snake



Eastern Garter Snake