

What's Around a Fox Den?

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Red foxes are curious, crafty, and all-around cool critters. Like many other intelligent animals, they are playful, too. However, the urban fox's choice of toys often pertains to feet, feces, and food with some dog toys thrown in. Photographed here are some of the items collected between a long-established den in Royal Lake Park and a new one a few hundred feet away. Fox tracks connect the dens, loop through the forest, and circle large trees as the foxes chased each other around the thick trunks, leaving these "toys" in their wake.

- Feet: foxes take shoes, boots, and flipflops from front steps. Matching sets show the foxes might pinch the pair! Best to thwart these little kleptos by always bringing shoes inside. Foxes also grab footwear that washes down from the streams.
- Feces: torn dog poop bags and dirty diapers (two present at the top right of this image) are also frequent finds. Whether obtained by raiding trash or from neglectful people tossing contaminants into the woods, foxes bring it home for their kits.
- Food: foxes carry back a fair amount of food wrappers and bottles. Whether the presence of food or the lingering smell are the attractants is unknown. In any case, the packaging become toys.

All of these items contain plastics and most bared teeth marks. Sometimes, passed plastic particles appear in fox scat. Even worse is when the plastics lodge into the animal's digestive system, which can be fatal. Unlike pets, a wild animal usually lacks veterinarian assistance unless it is so sick, someone chances upon it, and calls a wildlife rescue organization (in Fairfax County, call [Animal Control](tel:703-691-2131) at 703-691-2131). Kindly be sure to secure all belongings from the yard that a fox can drag away. Never litter. Dispose of all trash in a tough container instead of open bins or kitchen bags by the curb, which are an invitation for wildlife. Good citizen bonus points go to those who pick up rubbish as they exercise outdoors. Taking these small, healthy steps help keep everyone safe and the environment clean.

Learn more about foxes in the [Let's Look at Foxes](#) series (October – December 2019).

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