

How to Prevent Wildlife from Invading Homes

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As Old Man Winter greets us for another season, folks like to hunker down in their cozy homes. Many animals also prefer a warm nest or den against the cold, which is perfectly acceptable out in the fields or woodlands. Conflicts emerge when the mice, voles, chipmunks, and other small creatures slip into habitats designated only for humans and possibly their pets. Problems escalate when the uninvited guests chew into wire insulation, tear into cushioning or foam, raid pantries, deposit waste, and cause other sorts of damage. Sometimes during warmer months, snakes detect and follow their prey into the home. The simplest way of dealing with these human-animal conflicts is to prevent them from happening in the first place. Here is an easy, step-by-step guide to critter-proofing your dwellings. It uses a door gap and mouse as an example; you can apply the concept to your particular circumstance.

Step 1. Think like a mouse. Inspect all around your house for any inviting little holes (as little as the area of a quarter) into which the mouse may creep. It could be wall breakage, gaps in the siding, or in this example, a space under the door. Clean up any food, seed, and other lures around the house. Keep compost piles raised and dispose of large yard debris through yard pick-up. Do not create yard debris dumps including on parkland; they inevitably become rodent breeding grounds.



Step 2. Determine the best way to seal the hole. Hard seals (wood, metal, stone—all cut to size) offer the best defense against inquisitive rodents. Mice readily chomp through soft items like foam insulation. With this door, mice will easily bite through a rubber weather strip. Installing a door contouring to the lopsided step is not an option since the uneven concrete within the door's swing rises so any extended door would not completely open. In this case, we need to cut a piece of wood to fill the gap.

Step 3. Measure twice, cut once. Using thin paper and pen, trace the gap's area. Cut out that stencil and trace it onto a piece of scrap wood.



Step 4. Form the blocker. Cut the wood to form, erring on leaving it larger than necessary. Place the blocker on the threshold and gently close the door. File and sand any resistance points. Remember to account for hotter and more humid days, which may expand the blocker.

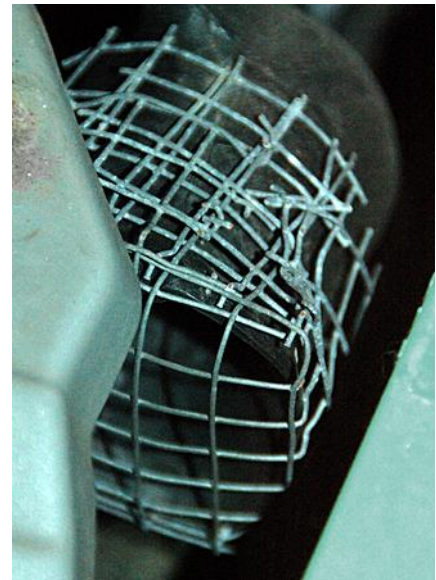


Step 5. The final fit. After a final sanding, the blocker may be left as is [seen full length (A) and close-up (B)], stained, or lightly painted. Make sure any final treatments will not be sticky and lead to a jammed door! Let this blocker rest in place without glue so it can be removed if needed (e.g., using a slightly shorter blocker to running a wire for Christmas lights). Barricade the gap throughout the year.



Depending on the case, take appropriate measures to deter the animal. For example, dissuade a mouse from nesting in a car's ductwork by blocking the air intakes with half-inch wire mesh (see image at right). If rodents are already inside, catch them using humane cages or traditional mouse traps—setting them away from where children and pets can get injured. **Never use poisons to catch mammals.** Nobody wants children, pets, or unknowing future home owners to stumble into the lethal residues. Even if the bait is away from pets' reach, the poisoned rodent may die in an area where it can be found, consumed, and the active toxins end up harming your beloved pet. Bring any poisons to the I-66 Transfer Station or I-95 Landfill Complex for free disposal at the Hazardous Household Waste Center; never dump poisons or throw them in the regular trash.

Remember to ditch the poisons and traps altogether. By following the basic logic presented in this article, any unwanted animals will remain outside and your home is free from invaders.



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