

Managing Rattlesnake Problems

<http://animalcontrol.co.la.ca.us/html/pages/wildlife/ratsnkes.htm>



CO-EXISTING WITH THE RATTLESNAKE

Spring and summer are rattlesnake season, particularly if you live in areas where there is a large amount of brush nearby. But the danger is minimal if you understand (1) how to keep rattlesnakes out of your yard, and (2) what to do if you do encounter one.

HOW TO IDENTIFY A RATTLER, AND WHAT TO EXPECT

Rattlesnakes are easily identifiable by their broad, triangular heads, narrow necks, relatively heavy bodies and rattle on the tail, or blunt tails if the rattles are missing. Baby rattlers can be as dangerous as adults. Rattlesnakes should not be confused with harmless gopher snakes, which are beneficial to humans as vermin catchers. (Both have blotch-like markings down the back.) Rattlesnakes will purposely attack only those animals smaller than themselves, such as rodents, unless they are frightened by noise, vibrations or certain odors. They are terrified by humans (mainly because of our size) and would rather run than fight if possible. Like all snakes, the body temperature of the rattlesnake depends on the air temperature, so you would be more likely to encounter a rattlesnake in the open during the warmest hours of a spring day and during the cooler hours (morning and evening) of a summer day.

PROTECTING YOURSELF AND YOURS

Rattlesnakes come into residential areas for two reasons: food and cover. Therefore, you should: 1. Eliminate the food attraction (rodents) by (a) keeping your yard free of places where mice or rats might nest, such as piles of grass cuttings or wood and trash, (b) plugging all ground openings, such as gopher holes, (c) using only covered trash containers. 2. Eliminate the cover attraction by (a) making sure there are several inches of ground clearance under shrubs, (b) avoiding tall ground covering, (c) moving hiding places such as large rocks or rubbish. If your property backs onto a canyon or other uninhabited area, you should clear a bare strip of from 30 to 100 feet, or cut back the chaparral to waist height and thin enough to let sunlight filter through. 3. Construct, if necessary to protect children, a snake-proof fence of heavy galvanized screen, 36 inches wide with 1/4-inch mesh. Bury the lower edge a few inches in the ground and slant the fence outward at a 30-degree angle from top to bottom. The ground outside the fence should be kept clear of tall vegetation - ladders for snakes.

FOR HIKERS

Be prepared, if you go hiking in brush, by (1) wearing loose trousers over boots or high-top shoes, (2) never stepping in or placing your hands in places where you can't see, and (3) never hiking alone.

IF THE WORST HAPPENS

If you see a rattlesnake on your property, call the Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care and Control. If someone is bitten by a rattlesnake, transport the victim to a hospital as quickly as possible or call the Sheriff or Fire Department for help transporting the victim. Call Animal Care and Control for removal of the rattlesnakes. Do remember: Stay calm, call for assistance and keep in mind that rattlesnake venom is of such a nature as to usually allow ample time for successful medical treatment.