

Snake Management for Alberta Residents

Snakes in Alberta

Snakes can be found across Alberta; providing many benefits such as reducing insect and small rodent populations, and acting as prey for other animals. Snakes are protected as a non-game animal under the provincial *Wildlife Act* (1997) which makes it illegal to kill, possess, buy or sell snakes native to Alberta. Snake hibernacula, underground chambers where snakes gather for the winter, and birthing dens, are also protected under the *Wildlife Act*.

Alberta has six resident snake species; bullsnake, plains garter snake, red-sided garter snake, wandering garter snake, prairie rattlesnake and the western hog-nosed snake. Of these, the prairie rattlesnake is the only snake with venom harmful to humans. The prairie rattlesnake is classified a '*Species of Special Concern*' in Alberta. As a result, this species has additional provincial guidance to protect its habitat.



Prairie Rattlesnake

Snakes on your land

Having snakes on your property is a good indication that your land practices maintain the quality and amount of habitat required for wildlife. Snakes are attracted to cool, dark, damp hiding places where prey is abundant. It is best to leave snakes alone if they are not causing harm or damage – they have intrinsic and ecological value.

The best way to keep snakes off your land is to make your property less attractive to snakes by removing food and shelter. Ways to achieve this include:

- Keeping your lawn closely mowed and your yard maintained.
- Removing all sheltering areas including piles of rock, lumber, junk and firewood or things like old boards on the ground.
- Not using mulch in flowerbeds.
- Keeping shrubs trimmed, and ensuring they are at least 30 cm off the ground to avoid providing hiding places.
- Keeping the area around buildings free from shrubs and other plants.
- Minimizing areas of tall grass or plants.
- Minimizing the number of rodents on your property by storing trash and animal feed in sealed trash cans and containers.

The use of snake repellents (either commercial or home-made) is not recommended, as there is no conclusive data supporting the effectiveness of these products.

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Snakes in your home

Snakes usually enter buildings to find prey, to hibernate through the winter or sometimes just by accident. Preventing access is best strategy to keep snakes out.. You can do this by:

- Sealing cracks or warps in the foundation, exterior walls or siding with mortar, caulking compound or 1/8 inch hardware cloth.
- Ensuring all doors to the building have tight weather stripping to limit potential access.
- Keeping garage doors closed and the bottom protected with metal flashing or other material if necessary.
- Checking for any small openings around electrical wiring and water pipes, and seal any openings that are found.
- Covering external drainpipes with 1/4 inch hardware cloth - be sure to check that this does not interfere with drainage.

Removal of non-venomous snakes from your home

Most snakes in Alberta are non-venomous, with round pupils and a round/oval head shape. Non-venomous snakes are harmless. If you do not feel comfortable removing a non-venomous snake from your home, call your local wildlife control.

Bucket Method

Gently sweep or guide the snake using a broom into a large, deep, clean pail or bucket. Release the snake outside.

Rumpled Clothes Method

Place a pile of damp clothes or burlap sacks in a corner to attract the snake to a humid location. Place a dry sack or clothes on top to

maintain the moisture. Monitor the area so you know when the snake has taken cover. Gently shovel the sacks/clothes into a bin mid-day and place outside, allowing the snake(s) to move out of the clothes/sacks.

Glue Board Method

Glue boards should be used as a last resort as they are messy and can involve handling the snake. Fasten glue boards purchased at a hardware store to a piece of plywood and place it along a wall or under a structure in the known area of the snake. These traps should not be used outdoors or in locations with pets or children. Check the glue boards several times per day. Once the snake is caught, bring the glue board outside and pour vegetable oil over the snake - avoiding its nostrils. Do not use other oils, such as motor oil, as these can be toxic. The oil will allow the snake to move freely, but you may have to assist the snake in moving off the board.

Contact the Alberta Environment and Parks Information Centre at 310-3773 to be connected with a local Fish and Wildlife officer or biologist if there are a large number of snakes in your area or home.

Removing venomous snakes from your home

The prairie rattlesnake is the only venomous snake in Alberta and can be identified by its vertical pupils and triangular head shape. **Do not attempt to remove this snake from your residence.** Confine the snake if possible and if safe to do so. Keep people and pets away from the snake. Call the report a poacher line at 1-800-642-3800 to reach a Fish and Wildlife officer who will assist with the removal of the snake.