



Springtime animal damage in your landscape

Recognize who is causing damage to your yard and landscape during spring and how to prevent it.

By Gretchen Voyle, Michigan State University Extension, April 14, 2016, Michigan

Raccoon and skunk looking for a midnight meal. Photo by Alfred Viola, Northeastern University, Bugwood.org

Spring may be here, but animals can still be causing damage to your lawn and landscaping. It's not just a winter thing. If you have put up barriers to prevent feeding, do not be too eager to take them down immediately. Even though grass and plants aren't that nutritious to animals at this point and are still starting to turn green, woody plants could still receive damage until May. Even if there has not been any feeding during winter, the opportunity has not gone by. Let's take a look at who could be doing this springtime critter damage in your yard.

Deer

During the winter, a deer's digestive system allows them to feed on and derive nutrition from woody material like twigs. During spring, the green and growing plants are not supplying much because they have just begun to grow. Deer are still feeding on woody plants, but will divert for a tasty tulip or other blooming treat. You may want to keep any fences or barriers in place until the end of April in case deer are still working on woody plants. To be safe, use a deer repellent on blooming tulips or other tasty plants. Daffodils are poisonous, so it would be highly unlikely any critter will eat them.

Raccoons

Raccoons are out of hibernation and voraciously feeding on everything from birdseed on the ground to what is not secured well in garbage cans. Use a rubbery bungee strap to hold lids on cans. If your pests are chewing through the straps, use a screen door spring with an S-hook at either end. They have not designed a raccoon to chew through that yet. Raccoons may be climbing trees and jumping onto roofs looking for new lodging. Make sure branches are no closer to the house than 6 feet away.

If chunks of sod are torn and flipped, this is the work of a raccoon looking for earthworms, soil insects and grubs. Raccoons are veritable storehouses of pathology

with over half a dozen diseases and viruses they could transmit to domestic pets and animals. Don't encourage them to visit because they are "cute little bandits."

Skunks and opossums

Skunks and opossums are foraging at night trying to pick up body weight lost during winter. They may also be looking under birdfeeders or in places where pet food is left out overnight. Neither of these animals traditionally damage landscaping, but skunks and raccoons can root around in lawns looking for invertebrates. Skunks pivot their bodies around their noses and dig in search of the snack of the moment. They leave holes ringed with piles of loose soil. Skunk, raccoon or mole digging does not always mean there are grubs in the lawn – they could be looking for earthworms.

Woodchucks

Woodchucks, or groundhogs, are another lover of delicious tulips and tender foliage. Repellants may be necessary. Make a note of what gets eaten so you know each spring where to use the repellants.

Moles

More piles of soil and raised tunnels may be found in your lawn caused by moles. Unless you dug in areas on the edge of dead grass and found grubs, [Michigan State University Extension](#) advises that you **do not use grub-killing products**. Earthworms are the primary target.

General pest-solving techniques

Use animal repellants before damage is found – there is no un-eating your tulips. Leaves and flowers can be eaten. Some animals like deer and rabbits may avoid blood meal used as a repellant, but raccoons will rush to it. Leave fences and barriers up awhile longer and then remove fences a few at a time. Stop feeding birds if the raccoon, mole and skunk damage under the feeders is more than you can tolerate. If raccoons or deer are damaging birdfeeders, take them down at night and secure them where your hungry horde cannot get to them. These guys are into midnight smash-and-munch behavior.

For moles, rake out piles of soil in the lawn and use a lawn roller to flatten tunnels. Put just enough water in the roller to level the tunnels and not leave a ditch. That is dependent on how wet the soil is when you roll your lawn