



## Groundhog Problems and Groundhog Damage-Ohio

Groundhogs are usually classified as a pest species due to their habits of digging and eating crops. The most common complaints include the following:

- Large burrow next to home
- Large burrow under deck
- Garden/landscaping being eaten

For these reasons, many people wish to have this nuisance animal trapped and removed. They can be trapped in live cage traps, or special lethal traps mounted right on the burrow entrance.

**GROUNDHOG BIOLOGY:** Groundhogs (*Marmota monax*) are rodents, and adults average 8-10 pounds. They give birth in spring to 3-6 young. They can live up to six years in the wild. They are primarily herbivorous, eating a wide variety of plants.

**GROUNDHOG BEHAVIOR:** Groundhogs are diggers. They excavate tunnels and burrows underground, in which they live and raise young. The tunnel may have up to five entrances and 50 feet of total tunnel distance. They create a den to live in, and to hibernate in. They are primarily active during the daytime. They can climb and swim, but they mostly stay in fields, foraging. When they sense danger, they retreat

for the tunnel. Woodchucks can create a wide variety of vocal noises. They grow fat during the summer, lethargic by autumn, and in winter, they hibernate. They emerge in spring and start the mating process.

**NUISANCE CONCERNS:** Woodchucks are considered agricultural pests, since they love to eat a wide variety of crops. However, their burrowing habits often cause a bigger problem. Horses can break their legs by stepping into burrows, and when a groundhog digs under a house or deck, the removal of soil can undermine the foundation.

**Biology** These mammals are herbivores so dine on grasses and other vegetation, including berries and items found in people's gardens. They will also eat insects including grubs, snails and beetles. They are also sometimes known to eat small mammals but this is a more uncommon occurrence than with other mammals of their family group. They tend to enjoy eating some nuts but don't hide their foods in caches like other animals do. They often weigh around six or eight pounds when full grown. These guys are for the most part diurnal which means they are awake during the day and that they sleep mostly at night.

**Life Cycle And Reproduction** In the wild a groundhog will generally live to be about six years old while in captivity some are known to live up to twenty. They are slower to become sexual active than others in the rodent group, generally waiting till their second year to mature. These mammals do hibernate and when they wake in March or April they are ready to enter the breeding season. The female is pregnant for about 31 days during which time the male stays with her in the den they create together. Right around time to birth the male leaves and the female will deliver anywhere from 2-6 young. The babies nurse for about six weeks before moving out to find their own den.

**Habitat** Groundhogs tend to enjoy living in open spaces where they have a lot of access to vegetation and other food staples. They like to find soft ground that lends itself well to their building dens and burrows. A groundhog's tunnel can have five or more entrances and exits so that more than one groundhog may use it as an escape. These mammals have been known to shuffle up a tree to check out their surroundings or to take a quick swim when needed but generally prefer living in open areas where it is easy for them to forage and find veggies to feed on. Groundhogs are major diggers and have been known to create tunnels that have up to fifty feet of tunnel spacing. They use their burrows for everything from hibernating to rearing their families. In the process of their creating these dens they have been found to move more than 700 pounds of dirt. Because of the large amount of digging and burrowing these mammals do, they can cause a fair amount of property destruction and even damage to foundations of buildings when they dig too close to structures.

**Common Diseases These Animals Can Spread** There are no known diseases these animals readily pass along to humans living nearby. Like all wild animals they can be a carrier of many different parasites including worms, fleas and ticks. All of which can infest any domestic animals a person has near woodchuck homes.

**Common Nuisance Complaints** These mammals need to eat a lot of vegetation and as such most gardens are prone to having a groundhog attempt to move in. These extra-large rodents also build big burrows or dens to live in and it is not unusual for their burrows to cause disruption when built near the foundation of a home or out building. Additionally, if accidentally cornered these mammals can be quite fierce, attempting to attack rather than flee. Moreover they create holes and tunnels compromising the ground in such a manner that horses can get a leg stuck and broken, as well as other animals or children who don't notice the holes before stepping into them.