

# HOW TO AVOID SNAKES IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS

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*By Ralph E. Mitchell*

Snakes are as much a part of Florida life as love bugs. For the most part, our forty-four native snakes are beneficial and seldom seen creatures that eat rodents, slugs and insect pests in your yard. However, with more urban growth, encounters with snakes and people are likely to increase. Snakes face their own threats from dogs, cats, lawnmowers, people and cars. Preventing snake encounters is often the best practice and accepting a degree of mutual coexistence is a practical expectation.

First, learn how to identify our local venomous and non-venomous snakes - knowing the difference is important and avoiding venomous snakes is essential. For the most part, killing snakes is not a suitable technique for eliminating all snakes from your yard. In fact, elimination of snakes can allow rodents to increase. Some non-venomous snakes even eat venomous snakes! Snake-proofing your yard involves making your yard a less attractive habitat to snakes. Keep your grass mowed and position other hiding places such as wood and brush piles away from your house. Store firewood off the ground on a rack or pallet. Also consider that landscape subjects such as rock walls are attractive snake and rodent cover and may require alteration to make them less attractive.

Once you have examined your yard to eliminate snake-friendly sites, check out your house and other such buildings for snake entry points. Snakes often enter a building under doors, openings in walls or gaps in a roof. Examine your screens for holes in windows, pool cages, and doors and make the necessary repairs. Very small snakes may only need an opening as large as a pencil to gain entry. Check your door sweeps that may in disrepair. Some larger gaps can be covered with hardware cloth to eliminate access points. Rat snakes have been known to enter such things as plumbing vent stacks that a covering of hardware cloth can stop. Seal around wires and plumbing where snakes can enter a house with caulking or foam. Pet doors also allow an easy access point for snakes. Keep in mind that snake repellants do not work.

Hand-in-hand with snake-proofing is rodent-proofing. We want to eliminate the food and shelter that help rodents thrive. Keep birdfeeders away from the house as you may be feeding rodents as well as birds. Consider not feeding the birds in late spring and summer when there are many other food sources available. Make sure that compost bins are secure to keep out mice and rats. If a rodent population is detected, reduce their numbers with carefully placed traps or obtain the services of a professional exterminator. Keep all human and pet foods in secure sealed containers to exclude rodents.

If you are encountering dangerous venomous snakes, fences can be erected to help keep them out. Fencing can be expensive and should be considered as a last resort. A two to

three foot high length of aluminum flashing, quarter-inch hardware cloth or silt fencing set six inches into the ground will help to keep most snakes out.

Living peacefully with snakes is possible when considering the benefits they provide and some common sense prevention options. Snake/rat-proofing, habitat modification and even construction of barriers can reduce your chance of crossing paths with these reptiles. I would also like to direct you to a new EDIS publication available on-line about snake encounters called "Dealing with Snakes in Florida's Residential Areas - Preventing Encounters" by Steve A. Johnson and Monica E. McGarrity available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/UW260>.

For more information and suggestions on all types of plants suitable for Charlotte County, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 764-4340 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harborview Road, Suite 3 in Port Charlotte. Our Plant Clinics are available across the county:

- Demonstration Garden every Thursday from 9:00am until 11:00am.
- Englewood/Charlotte Public Library 9:00am until noon every Monday.
- Mid County Regional Library first and third Thursday of the month from 1:00pm until 3:00pm.
- Edison College Learning Resources Library third Tuesday of the month from 1:00pm until 4:00pm.

Ralph Mitchell is the county extension director/horticulture agent for the Charlotte County Cooperative Extension Service. You may contact him by e-mail [Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com](mailto:Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com) You may also contact a volunteer Master Gardener from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by e-mail [Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com](mailto:Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program. please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at (941) 764-4340. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

*Resource:*

*Johnson, S. A. & McGarrity, M. E. (2007), Dealing with Snakes in Florida's Residential Areas - Preventing Encounters. The University of Florida Extension Service, IFAS.*