



# MANAGING RATTLESNAKE PROBLEMS

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COUNTY OF  
LOS ANGELES  
ANIMAL CARE  
AND CONTROL

## COEXISTING WITH THE RATTLESNAKE

Spring and summer are the Rattlesnake seasons, 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 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 a rattle on the tail, or blunt tails if the rattles are missing. Baby Rattlers are as dangerous as adults, at birth, a 'pre-button' is present at the tip of the snakes tail; it is replaced by a button several days later when the first skin is shed. However, no sound can be made by the rattle until a second segment is added when the skin is shed again. Rattlesnakes should not be confused with the harmless Gopher snake, 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 afraid of 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 most 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.

A misnomer often heard is that a Rattlesnake and a Gopher snake interbreed, making them difficult to identify, this is impossible. A Rattlesnake gives live birth while the Gopher snake lays eggs, the two species cannot interbreed, but often do hibernate together where the misnomer most likely originated from.

## 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
  - ❖ keeping your yard free of places where mice or rats might nest, such as piles of grass cuttings or wood and trash;
  - ❖ plugging all ground opening, such as gopher holes; and
  - ❖ using only covered trash containers.
2. Eliminate the cover attraction by
  - ❖ making sure there are several inches of ground clearance under shrubs;
  - ❖ avoiding tall ground covering; and
  - ❖ moving hiding places such as large rocks or rubbish. If your property backs up to a canyon or other uninhabited area, you should clear a bare strip of 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 heavily galvanized screen, 36 inches wide with ¼- inches mesh. Bury the lower edge a few inches in the ground and slant the fence outward at a 30-degree angle from the top to bottom. The ground outside the fence should be kept clear of tall vegetation-ladders for the snakes.

#### **FOR HIKERS**

Be prepared, if you go hiking by brush, by

1. wearing loose trousers over boots or high-top shoes;
2. wearing “Snake Guards” which can be purchased on-line;
3. never stepping in or placing your hands in places where you can’t see; and
4. never hiking alone

#### **IF THE WORST HAPPENS**

If you see a rattlesnake on your property, call the County of Los Angeles Department of Animal Care and Control. Keep an eye on the rattlesnake’s whereabouts until an officer arrives at a safe distance. If a rattlesnake bites someone, transport the victim to a hospital as quickly as possible or call 911 to help transport the victim. Call Animal Care and Control for removal of the rattlesnake. Do remember to 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.