

Fighting Those Pesky Chipmunks

Tips To Help Control The Population Of Cute Critters

By **THERESA SULLIVAN BARGER** Special to The Courant
Published August 3, 2016

If this year's bumper crop of chipmunks has you contemplating lethal measures, experts offer several less drastic options.

By mid-summer, it's too late for a pest removal company to have much of an impact, since most chipmunks have had their second litter by July, says Michael Caldwell, owner of Michael's Carpenter Ant & Termite Service of East Granby. It's best to catch chipmunks in early spring before they give birth to an average of three to five pups.

Even if exterminators came daily for two weeks and laid the average 10 to 20 traps, they could not eliminate the population, only reduce it, he says. (However, homeowners planning an installation of a walkway, patio or other hardscape this summer may want to hire an exterminator, he says, because chipmunks love tunneling in fresh soil and can ruin the integrity of a new hardscape.)

There's no single, scientifically proven method to remove chipmunks, but experts suggest multiple steps to at least take away the welcome mat and reduce the critters' destruction.



For starters, chipmunks choose homes where they can hide from predators, seeking out stone walls, wood piles, deep mulch, shrubs and dense ground cover, says Carol Quish, horticulturist at UConn's Home and Garden Education Center.

"Think about the whole system and how you can interrupt what's making them happy in that system," she says.

- Keep mulch thick enough to control weeds, but not so deep that it creates a burrowing spot for chipmunks. (Caldwell favors stone over mulch in the landscape because it's less hospitable to several pests.)
- When chipmunks become active in early spring, remove food sources, like bird feeders. Chipmunks love seeds. Planting sunflower seeds is like "putting out truffles for them," Quish says.
- Frighten them away with a rotating collection of scare tactics — strategically placed rubber snakes, Mylar balloons, balloons with a giant eye, old CDs hung to catch the light, Christmas tinsel, a child's pinwheel and bobble-headed owls, experts say. Move items around because chipmunks catch on after a few days.
- Introduce smells, tastes and sounds that repel them. Chipmunks don't like pepper, garlic or mint. Sprinkle cayenne pepper and garlic into garden beds and pots, repeating every few days in hot, humid weather. Create a hostile environment for their ears by alternately blaring music, setting your phone to obnoxious alarm sounds or using sound-emitting devices.
- Commercial products created to repel deer should work just as well against chipmunks, Quish says, since neither likes mint, rotten eggs, garlic or hot red pepper, which are commonly found in those products. Deer Scram and Deer Out, both organic, effectively repel chipmunks as well as deer.
- Joe Magazzi, co-owner of Green Earth Ag & Turf in Branford, suggests repelling chipmunks by placing dryer sheets in chipmunk holes and around your garden and flower beds.
- Dab a few drops of essential peppermint oil onto cotton balls, place into a zippered plastic bag and poke holes into the bag, suggests Quish. Hang the bags near chipmunk activity and they'll stay away for at least a few weeks, she says. When you no longer smell the mint, reapply.
- To evict chipmunks, Quish sprinkles black pepper directly into their holes. Or, place dried blood or human hair near or inside their holes, says Nancy DuBrule-Clemente, owner of Natureworks in North Branford.
- Avoid moth balls or moth flakes because they're toxic to wildlife and people, Quish says.

If chipmunks are digging through your flower pots, place aluminum foil on top of the soil; chipmunks don't like walking on it.

Finally, enlist some help: Invite chipmunk predators into your yard by installing a tall post from which birds of prey can perch.