

Living with Possums



CITY OF
MITCHAM

If you hear things in your roof that go bump, scratch, hiss, cough, screech or growl in the night, chances are you have a possum in residence!

URBAN POSSUMS

There are two types of possums that live in suburban gardens, the Brushtail Possum and the Ringtail Possum. If you have a possum in your roof it is most likely to be a Brushtail Possum.



A Brushtail Possum has four distinct characteristics. It is the size of a domestic cat, has long oval ears, grey fur and a distinguishing bushy black tail. The Ringtail Possum has different characteristics it is smaller, with small round ears and small eyes. The fur is grey on the back with a rusty colour on the sides. The tail is long and prehensile (adapted for gripping) and covered with fine white fur.



WHY MY ROOF?

Brushtail possums favour tree hollows for making their dens, but in urban areas they may seek the warm, dark and safe shelter of house roofs to sleep during the day. They become active at night when they go out to seek food.

The only solution to a possum in your roof is to remove it and stop it from getting back in.

First check that your roof resident is a possum. Rats commonly enter roofs, they are not an indicator of a dirty or derelict house. Rats make light scampering and gnawing sounds compared with a possum's guttural hiss and heavy thumping.

Possums can gain access to the roof space through loose tiles or roofing iron, broken eaves and holes in timber or brickwork.

HOW CAN I MAKE MY HOUSE POSSUM PROOF?

The best way to make sure your house is possum proof is to keep up with good general home maintenance. If you always keep your eye out for loose tiles, gaps under eaves and around gutters or any other small gaps then it should be, to a certain extent, possum proof. There are repellents that you can make up that will deter the possum from returning. Also, you could build a possum nesting box that will also discourage them from nesting in your roof.

HOW TO MAKE A POSSUM NESTING BOX

Use rough untreated wood to aid the possum's grip. Do NOT use chipboard, green pine, Smelly glue, toxic paint, or leave any nails or screws protruding.

Street Address:
131 Belair Road
Torrens Park SA 5062

Postal Address:
PO Box 21
Mitcham Shopping Centre
Torrens Park SA 5062

Phone: (08) 8372 8888
Fax: (08) 8372 8101
mitcham@mitchamcouncil.sa.gov.au
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GENERAL NESTING BOX REQUIREMENTS

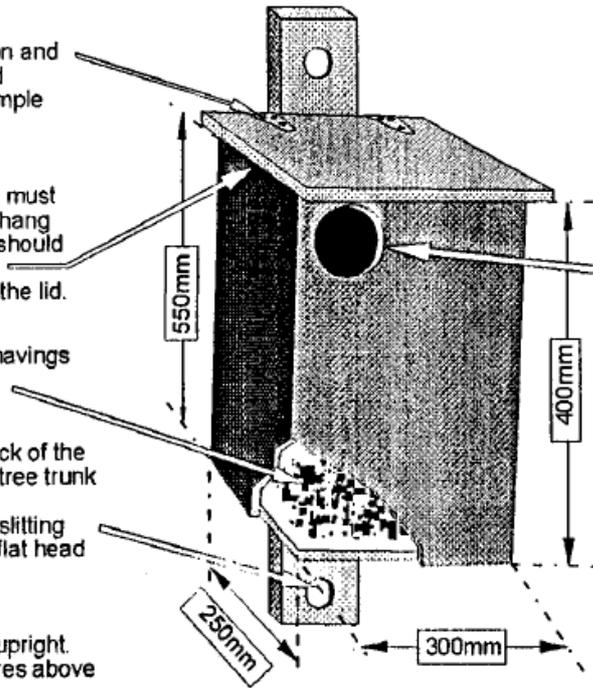
A hinged lid permits inspection and cleaning out after use. The lid should be secured using a simple clip or partly driven nail.

For weather protection the lid must slope from the back and overhang the front by about 25 mm. It should also overhang the sides. DO NOT use sheet metal on the lid.

20 mm deep layer of wood shavings should cover the floor.

Fix a mounting strip to the back of the box to make attachment to a tree trunk easier. Pre drill nail holes to prevent splitting and use 100 mm galvanized flat head nails.

The box must be stable and upright. Place the box at least 3 metres above the ground



Nesting boxes are best made from rough sawn timber so animals can get a better grip and should be about 19 - 25 mm thick to provide insulation. DO NOT USE treated timber, toxic paints, chipboard, smelly glues, or leave any sharp objects such as protruding nails or screws.

Entrance hole should be no bigger than is necessary for animal the box is intended to house. i.e. 80 - 100 mm for brushtail possums.

Entrance should be near the top and to one side of the box to minimise entry of light.

Please note: Nesting boxes must be checked regularly to prevent introduced birds from using the box. Throw out any nesting materials they leave in y nesting box.

WHAT TO DO IF THERE A POSSUM IN YOUR ROOF

If you have found a possum in your roof a good start is to place a bright light in your roof. As possums are nocturnal and don't like light it will encourage them outside into the dark backyard. Also the light will show you where the holes are that need to be fixed to prevent the possum from returning to your roof.

You can hire possum traps from the City of Mitcham, call 8372 8888 for details. Traps must be set in a stable level position protected from dogs, cats, wind, rain and direct sun. All traps are to be checked no later than two hours after sunrise. Trapped possums must be kept within the trap in a quite place, covered with a cloth or bag, and must be released within 50 metres of the capture site at sunset on the day of capture.

Possums are very territorial and will kill intruders. For this reason they must only be released into their own territories so that food supplies, water, shelter and mates are not disturbed.



WHY ARE THEY EATING MY PLANTS?

Possums normally eat gum leaves and native flowers but they have been replaced by the reward of food found in your backyard, meaning your plants.

Nothing is sacred when you have a possum as they eat anything and everything from vegetables like broccoli, celery, tomatoes, lettuce and capsicums, to fruits like apples, pears and stone fruit. Also plants including gardenias, fuchsias and roses are favourites.

- It is difficult to deter possums from eating your roses and flowers once they get a taste for them, but some of the following suggestions may help:
- Put a spotlight or party lights to shine on the area for a few nights as they do not like bright lights and learn to avoid that part of the garden.
- Put sheet metal collars around the trunk of your fruit trees.
- Try one of the proprietary brands of possum deterrents which are usually available from garden centres and hardware stores such as:
 - Scat made by multi crop
 - D-Ter (advertised safe for birds and animals)
 - Citronella Oil
 - Quassia Spray—(available from some pharmacies)



Unfortunately there is no foolproof way to stop the possums enjoying your plants, but if you put up a platform (such as an enamel plate nailed to a branch) with a selection of fruit and vegetables on it a few times a week, they would probably turn their attention to that and you would have the pleasure of seeing them feeding and playing.

POSSUMS AND THE LAW

Like all other native animals, possums are protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1975. They must not be harmed in any way or kept without an authority from the Department for Environment & Heritage. A permit is required to be obtained prior to the hiring of cages from council. Contact DEH on 8204 1910 or Belair Nat Park on 8278 5477.

It is illegal to handle or interfere with possums except when they are in your roof, or other buildings. Without a permit form from NP&W.

Trapped possums must be released that day on the same property, in their own territory, within 50 metres of the capture site. Relocating possums is both illegal and inhumane.

By providing a nest box for shelter and a feeding platform for food you are playing an important part in a positive solution to the conservation of Australia's native animals.

POSSUM REPELLENTS

Quassia Chips – boil the Quassia chips and spray around roof. Possum's will lick their paws and the bitter taste will make them think twice before returning.

Spray plants that are affected also, and repeat after rain.

Mutton Fat (9 Parts) + Kerosene (1 part) – Wipe over affected areas.

Blood and Bone fertiliser – Place at the base of the plants (this can attract dogs.)

Hot English Mustard + water – spray or paint on to plants and shrubs.

Egg Powder (200g) + Water (1 litre) – is most effective sprayed onto plants and shrubs. Note: that this may cause leaf death if the plant is suffering from water stress.

WHAT IF IT DOESN'T WORK?

There are a number of places that can provide you with further information on how to live in harmony with possums, and answer questions about abandoned or injured native animals. These organisations are:

FAUNA RESCUE OF SA – wildlife hotline (24hrs) 08 8289 0896

FRUIT TREES

- Make sure trees are trimmed away from fences and other trees by at least four feet
- Feeding possums on other foods (like veggie scraps and bread can be a good decoy at ripening time)

The City of Mitcham does not endorse any particular product or suggestion. The ideas on this leaflet have been tried by people with varying success. We hope you find a solution that suits your situation.

