

Rotating Article

for: Week of May 20, 2002

by: John D. Atkins

Extension Agronomy/Livestock Agent
Santa Rosa County

Controlling Armadillo Damage

These days, it seems that armadillos have replaced opossums as the animal with the most frequent deadly encounters with cars and trucks. Armadillos are found throughout the Southern U.S. The South's high temperatures, humidity, and sandy-loam soils create the perfect habitat for this animal. They are known to be voracious diggers, digging burrows as long as 15 feet. This often causes damage to yards as well as homes and driveways as the animal burrows beneath.

The nine-banded armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*) gets its name from the nine moveable rings of armor between the shoulder and the hip shields. It has a long tail that is also protected by rings of armor. Armadillos are about the size of opossums.

If you understand the habits of armadillos, you will be better prepared to control these nocturnal animals. They burrow in the ground and have strong legs adapted for digging. They root about in ground litter searching for insects, grubs and other invertebrates. While searching for food, they seem oblivious to anything else and may come very close to human beings before becoming alarmed.

As armadillos search for food, they dig small holes about 3 inches wide and 5 inches deep in the ground. Armadillos will also uproot flowers and other vegetation in loose soils. Their burrowing can also damage shrubs and other woody landscape plants. This characteristic makes them particularly troublesome around gardens.

These feeding habits can cause severe damage to lawns and gardens. Here are some suggestions for controlling them.

Since armadillos feed on invertebrates in the ground, eliminating the food source will often cause armadillos to look elsewhere for food. However, ridding the soil and vegetation of all insects, worms and grubs may not be practical and may be detrimental to the plants and other life-forms in the area.

Live traps can be used to catch problem armadillos. Baits include nightcrawlers, frozen crickets or over-ripe fruits such as bananas and peaches. These traps are more effective when "wings" are added to direct the animal into the trap. Set the traps in the area where the damage is occurring, for example, around the house, in the flower garden or in the vegetable garden. Captured animals can then be released in another area.

If the damage is isolated to a garden area, an electric fence may be an effective form of control. A single strand 3 to 4 inches off the ground should be sufficient. Polytape electric fence wire with a New Zealand-type charger makes an effective and safe exclusion device. However, be very careful when placing a fence in areas where children may play.

No toxicant, fumigants or repellents are currently registered for armadillo control. However, since damage is usually localized, the control measures suggested here should be useful.

There is no closed hunting season for armadillo, if it is legal to use a firearm in your area you may harvest the nuisance armadillo. A license or permit for a property owner to take a nuisance armadillo found damaging personal property provided that they be taken only within the immediate locality where damage

is occurring. This does not authorize the use of a gun and light at night. A permit to use a gun and light at night may be obtained from the appropriate regional office of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

If armadillos have become troublesome in your area, try these recommendations, and give us a call here at the county Extension office for more information.

John Atkins is Agronomy/Livestock Agent for Santa Rosa County.

Extension Service programs are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, age, handicap or national origin.