Outwit and outlast the troublesome armadillo

Have you ever discovered your once beautiful green lawn looking like the surface of the moon, full of craters? If so, then you may have been visited by an alien-looking creature known as the armadillo.

Armadillos originated in South America. They are mammals. They are neither rodents nor marsupials and are not related to the opossum. Their closest living relative is the anteater and sloth.

The most easily recognized feature of an armadillo is its shell. Their common name, armadillo, is derived from a Spanish term meaning “little armored one”. All armadillos have shells, made of true bone, that cover their backs. Most armadillos also have bony rings or plates that protect their tails.

Digging machines
Armadillos are built to dig. They rely on this ability to escape danger and survive. They prefer sandy or
loam soils that are relatively easy to excavate. Therefore, they are well adapted to Northwest Florida soils.

Armadillos typically rest in deep burrows during the day and become more active during the late evening, night, or early morning. These burrows are usually located under brushpiles, stumps, dense brush, or concrete patios, and are about 7 to 8 inches in diameter and can be up to 15 feet long. They often have several burrows throughout their territory.

**Food sources**

Armadillos feed primarily on insects. They also eat earthworms, scorpions, spiders, snails, and small vertebrates and their eggs. They consume large amounts of armyworms, cockroaches, ants, wasps, flies, beetles, and grasshoppers. They have been known to dig up entire yellow-jacket nests.

Some consider the armadillo a beneficial creature because they eat potential pests. Many consider the armadillo a pest because of their destructive ways. Armadillo can burrow under driveways and patios causing structural damage. Burrows in pastures can pose a potential hazard to livestock. And because armadillos usually search for food by rooting or digging in the ground, they can damage large areas of the lawn or garden.

**Control measures**

If you find that you cannot live with these creatures, the University of Florida recommends four ways to deal with armadillos.

- reducing the amount of water and fertilizer you apply to your lawn
- creating barriers (e.g., fences),
- live-trapping
- shooting offending individuals (check local ordinances)

The best solution (and the most expensive) is a stout fence to keep the armadillos out. If you take this route, make sure the fence is buried at least 18 inches into the ground, or they might just burrow under it.

Reducing the water and fertilizer applications to your lawn may help reduce armadillo damage. A moist lush landscape is perfect for earthworms and insect larvae. Armadillos love earthworms. Sometimes watering adjacent areas may attract armadillos away from a site.

Trapping can be frustrating and may require some ingenious thinking. Some tried and true trapping techniques are discussed at length in an online University of Florida publication by Dr. Russ Mizell at [http://ufinsect.ifas.ufl.edu/armadillo.htm](http://ufinsect.ifas.ufl.edu/armadillo.htm).
Remember that poison baits are illegal and ineffective. No chemical repellents or fumigants are registered for use in Florida.

Armadillos are very happy in Northwest Florida and are here to stay. If they have become unwelcomed house guests, put your thinking cap on and be committed to outwitting and outlasting this prehistoric-looking creature.

Theresa Friday is the Environmental Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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