

Learning to Live with Coyotes in Metropolitan Areas

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Urban Coyotes

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are 25- to 40-pound doglike mammals that now inhabit many metropolitan areas of Virginia. Being generalists, they eat plants, animals, and even garbage. However, their diet mainly includes rodents, other small mammals, fruits, and vegetables, all of which are available in metropolitan areas. Although coyotes may help reduce the numbers of other problematic animals, we must respect their wild nature while learning to co-exist with them.

The Threat

When people intentionally feed coyotes or unknowingly make supplemental food resources available, coyotes often begin to lose their instinctive fear of humans; this process of habituation then poses a potential threat to local residents. Small children and adults have been attacked in other cities where coyotes are known to have been fed by people. In addition to human safety concerns, we need to consider pet safety as well. Outdoor cats and small dogs serve as potential prey, whereas larger dogs also may be attacked when viewed by coyotes as potential competitors. Coyotes may carry diseases, viruses, and parasites, some of which, such as rabies, pose serious health concerns for humans.

The Solution

Prevention is the best policy! If everyone works together and follows these simple guidelines, we can minimize conflicts with coyotes.

1. Keep your pets and their food and water indoors. Supervise your pets when they are outdoors.
2. Spay/neuter your dogs to prevent hybridization. Keep pets current on vaccinations.
3. Supervise young children when outdoors. Teach them that coyotes may be observed at a distance, but they should never approach them close enough to touch or feed them. Children should tell an adult if they see a coyote.

4. Place garbage cans at the curb on the morning of scheduled pickup and use only tightly secured containers.
5. Clean up any spilled birdseed, fruits, or vegetables in patios or gardens. Use closed containers for compost rather than open piles.
6. If you are concerned about coyotes using your yard, consider reducing the presence of low ground cover that may harbor rodents and small mammals, the coyote's preferred prey. Also, examine and modify, as necessary, the presence of other vegetation to reduce its attractiveness as a resting area for coyotes.
7. Treat any emerging rodent problem immediately and follow label directions on commercially available and EPA registered rodent control products used.
8. If you choose to fence your yard, it is helpful to make it at least six feet tall, arched outward at the top, and buried one to two feet. Please be aware that most of the commonly installed suburban backyard fences are not coyote-proof.
9. Take extra precautions near any potential den sites during pup-rearing season (May-August); coyotes may become aggressive if they feel threatened.
10. Most importantly, DO NOT FEED COYOTES!

If You See a Coyote

Don't panic! Most coyotes will leave the area when they detect your presence. If, after seeing you, the coyote does not leave, then make a loud noise or, if at night, turn on nearby lights. If a stubborn coyote still does not go away, throw rocks or sticks near it to make it flee. If the above techniques are unsuccessful, or if you are uncomfortable with the circumstances, please call your local animal control specialist and seek professional assistance in resolving the situation.