



Wild Animals in Garbage Cans and Dumpsters

Situation: Wild animals are getting into trash cans, carts, or dumpsters.

Why This Happens: The animals are attracted to the smell of food and enter unsecured trash receptacles in the hope of finding something to eat. Sometimes, gnawing animals like squirrels will chew their way into plastic trash cans or carts. Climbing animals like raccoons may use nearby objects like walls, poles, or trees to gain access to dumpsters, but then not be able to get out.

FAQs and Humane Solutions:

"Raccoons keep getting into the dumpster in our alley at night. How can I keep them out?"

Avoid problems with wild animals going into dumpsters by keeping the lids of the dumpster closed, especially at night.

Be sure to also keep the dumpster at least three feet away from fences, brick walls, trees and utility poles that animals could climb to get into the dumpster (see photo below).

"Animals keep getting into our trash cans and making a mess! How can I keep them out?"

You can help avoid problems with animals getting into your trash cans or carts by keeping the cans or cart in the garage until your trash collection day.

If keeping the trash receptacles in the garage would be to secure their lids with bungee cords (see photo above right). Bungee cords are inexpensive stretchable bands of rubber or elastic with a hook on each end and are available at hardware stores and home centers.

"Squirrels have gnawed through the lid of our plastic trash cart and they go in there looking for food. Is there anything I can do to stop that?"

You can discourage squirrels from going into the cart after your trash by double-bagging your trash in securely-closed plastic trash bags (to suppress the scent of any food items inside). You could also try using a scent that squirrels don't like on top of your trash inside the cart such as peppermint oil or household ammonia applied to a paper towel or old cloth.



Keep the dumpster lids closed to help keep animals out



A bungee cord will help keep animals out of a trash can



Keep the dumpster at least 3 feet from walls, fences and poles



Provide a ladder or board to help an animal escape from a dumpster

"An opossum climbed into our trash cart last night, but I don't think it can get out. What should we do?"

If you gently tip the container over on its side with the lid open, and then leave the area, the animal will leave on its own. However, it may not wish to leave during the daytime, especially if there is human activity in the area. If there is a lot of vehicle traffic close by or there are children in the area, keep them away and wait until after dusk to lay the cart or can on its side. Do not offer the opossum any food or water.



Gently tip a trash can or cart on its side to let an animal get out of the container

"A raccoon climbed into our dumpster at work but there isn't much trash in there and I don't think it can climb out. What should we do?"

Place a ladder or a sturdy branch or board for the animal to climb on in the dumpster at a shallow angle leading up to the top of the container (see photos at right and above right). The dumpster lid should be left open to allow the animal to exit. It is important to know that raccoons are generally active only at night, so it may not leave until after dark. Keep activity to a minimum in the area around the dumpster so the animal will not be too frightened to leave. Do not offer the raccoon any food or water. If the dumpster is scheduled for emptying or pickup that same day, and you are in Milwaukee County, please call the Wisconsin Humane Society Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at (414) 431-6204. We may be able to help.



A sturdy branch should help an animal climb out of a dumpster

If you have a situation in Milwaukee County involving young animals without their mother in a dumpster or garbage cart, please contact the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at (414) 431-6204 for further advice.

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*You may **donate** online or by mailing a check to the following address:
WHS Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, 4500 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53208*