

LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

— Gardening Tips



By **Donna DuBreuil**,

President, Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

The nicer weather brings out the gardener in all of us. At the same time, wildlife is becoming more active after a long winter, leading to potential turf wars with our four-legged friends. But, this year, you can gain the upper hand.

The key is to start early and be consistent. Fresh new shoots on ornamental shrubs serve as a great attraction for a multitude of animals from squirrels to groundhogs and rabbits, when their natural vegetation is still not plentiful. It is much easier to use a number of deterrents at the beginning of the season before a problem develops, than to break animals of a bad habit once started.

Use plastic garden mesh to protect plants when they are just starting to come into leaf. There are also a number of taste

and smell deterrents that will keep wildlife away from flower and vegetable gardens. It is best to use a number together. For example, by sprinkling blood meal fertilizer on the soil (dig in lightly) around your plants or by placing dog hair in the toe of a nylon stocking that is tied to a stake placed a foot high around the plants, you are letting animals know that a predator is nearby.

Taste deterrents can be applied directly to the plants. Talcum powder mixed with water and sprayed lightly on leaves, vegetables and flowers will serve to discourage most animals as they don't like the gritty taste. It doesn't show on the plants and you can wash it off vegetables before eating. Some other tips to keep in mind:

Before taking down a tree or removing branches, check to make sure there aren't leaf nests or cavities that would be home

to babies that would be too young to escape.

If you find a nest of baby squirrels or raccoons when cleaning out a shed or garage, put it back intact exactly as you've found it and give the mother a few days to relocate her young.

A nest of baby rabbits in your garden should also be left alone as the mother only returns during the night or at dusk to feed her young.

If your barbecue hasn't been used for a while, check it out thoroughly before lighting as red squirrels and mice will sometimes have a nest of babies under the grill.

There are lots of other tips at www.wildlifeinfo.ca for dealing with wildlife concerns. Remember, this is also the height of the wildlife birthing season so don't take any action until you check out this helpful site.