

Snakes Are on the Move

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I'm not sure that I really understand why, but a lot of people really don't like snakes. If I'm talking to a group of people and I mention snakes and start to talk about snakes, I can see the audience starting to shift and squirm in the seats. Just by saying snakes at the start of my column I've probably given a good 25% of the readership the shudders!

For the record, all snakes are very beneficial to the environment and the ecosystem around us. Yes, there are poisonous snakes and 99.9% of the snakes killed every year are NOT poisonous. In 30+ years of being on this job, I can count the number of poisonous snakes brought into my office on one hand, actually just two fingers! Sadly I've had dozens of dead snakes also brought into my office that were not poisonous.

With the days getting shorter in a hurry, and colder weather starting to sneak in, snakes are heading into hibernation for the winter and probably not a moment too soon for some folks! Some snake species burrow deep in the ground to escape winter's cold. Some gather up in cave like dens or manmade equivalents like old hand dug wells. I've observed 20 or 30 snakes of a half dozen species inside some of these covered hand dug wells. Unfortunately, some snakes also find older homes with rock foundations or any home with gaps, holes or crevices in the foundation to be an inviting place to spend the winter.

Let's also get a myth out of the way that there is some way to repel snakes. Electronic devices do not work. Moth balls and other scent based remedies do not work. Some of the sulfur based powders MAY work for some species, but keep in mind that anything that will keep a snake out of an area, can also trap one inside the same area. Are you sure you want to do that? Ultimately, exclusion is the only way to keep them out of your house or any building.

Snakes have the ability to fit through a very small opening. A snake that seems to be one inch in diameter can go through an opening much smaller than that. In general, you want to seal all openings 1/4 inch and larger. By the way, anything you can do to snake proof your house is equally effective at weatherproofing, mouse proofing and insect proofing your house. Seal it up and keep them out! I like to use silicon caulking as it seems to stick best to most anything and will flex with changes in temperatures.

If you live near rock ledges or have a lot of rocks in your landscape you are going to see quite a few more snakes, as well as scorpions and spiders. All of these creatures like the rocks to give them added warmth on autumn days after the sun goes down. The rocks also offer a lot of cracks and crevices to hide in. Again, there's nothing that you can spray on these areas that will repel snakes.

Sanitation is a good thing however. Don't let weeds and grass get overgrown. This just gives all of these creatures more places to hide. Keep firewood stacked away from the house (a good termite prevention technique also). Keep brush piles and other debris from lying close to the house. These areas also provide lots of good hiding places for snakes.

Ultimately the more snakes that survive each winter the fewer mice and rats, crickets and other insects we will have next year. The old saying that the only good snake is a dead snake really is not true. Just be aware that they are not out to get you, they will be active for a few more weeks, but before long they'll be tucked away for the winter and you won't have to worry about them for a while anyway!