

# Squirrely woodchucks have their way with gardens

Woodchucks are stocky squirrel family members common throughout Indiana.

Their extensive burrowing in fields interferes with farming, causes injury to equipment and livestock and creates significant erosion problems in dams and railroad embankments.

One or two woodchucks can ruin a small garden overnight.

On the other hand, their burrows provide refuge for other wildlife and contribute to soil aeration and mixing.

Many people enjoy watching them since they're one of the few large wild mammals visible in daytime.

Consequently, woodchucks are wildlife and should be controlled only when they become troublesome.

The woodchuck weighs 4 to 14 pounds and has short, powerful legs, small ears and a short, bushy tail. The body fur is long, coarse and grizzled grayish-brown in color.

There are four clawed toes on each front foot and five toes on the hind feet.

Woodchucks eat grasses, legumes, plantain and other tender green succulents. In crop areas, they devour soybeans and young corn plants and ears in the milk stage. Adult woodchucks daily consume up to 1½ pounds of vegetation.

The woodchuck spends most of its day in the burrow. Weather conditions and the season cause feeding times to vary.

During cool, spring days, it's most active in the warmer parts of the day. However, the warmest parts of summer days are spent in the burrow and feeding occurs in early morning and at dusk.



Kimberly J. Moore

Woodchucks are least active on cool days. They hibernate from mid-October to February.

The animals mate shortly after emergence, with a litter of four to six young born a month later. The young leave the nest in early July to establish their own burrows and territories.

Woodchucks live an average of four to six years.

Aside from burrows, woodchucks also make seasonal dens.

Winter dens have a single opening in wooded areas with the hibernation chamber underneath a tree or stump for protection against intruders.

These dens are abandoned several weeks after hibernation when the animals move into nearby grassy meadows or crop fields and construct summer dens.

Summer dens have one to five openings, including a primary entrance and several escape holes. These "plunge" holes are concealed among vegetation and may be plugged. Older dens may be complex, lengthy and have several openings.

Most burrow systems are 2 to 4 feet underground and extend horizontally 15 to 25 feet. The main nest chamber is at the burrow system terminus.

The primary entrance is surrounded with fresh earth and numerous trails leading to the feeding areas and auxiliary burrow systems.

Because the auxiliary burrows are used for refuge from danger during the animals' daily foraging activities, there may be constant movement between dens during the summer.

The home range of woodchucks varies considerably. In favorable habitats, woodchucks may forage 20 to 30 yards from their dens and several hundred yards in poor habitats.

Use control measures in early spring when active burrows are easily found, the young woodchucks haven't yet scattered, and there's less likelihood of harming other wildlife.

Woodchucks are most sensibly controlled in crop fields with fumigation of dens or by shooting. Live-trapping is the safest and best means to non-lethally control the woodchucks around buildings or high fire hazard areas.

Control programs should be systematic and encompass the affected field and surrounding areas. Give attention to well-drained protected areas, wooded crop borders and weedy fence rows.

Flag all active burrows for rechecking and retreating later. If the affected area includes adjoining property, seek cooperation from neighboring landowners.

Without a thorough program, long-term control results are likely to be poor because invading individuals will replace exterminated woodchucks.

Kimberly J. Moore is extension educator for agriculture and natural resources at the Johnson County Purdue Extension Office.

## MARCH GARDEN CALENDAR

### Indoor plants and activities

- Apply fertilizer to houseplants according to label directions as days grow brighter and longer and new growth begins. Foliage plants require a relatively high-nitrogen fertilizer, while blooming plants thrive on formulations that are higher in phosphorus.

- Remove spent leaves and flowers regularly to improve appearance and encourage more blooms.
- Start seeds of cool-season plants for transplanting outdoors later in spring.

### Woody landscape plants and fruit trees

- Prune trees and shrubs while plants are still dormant. Those that bloom early in spring should be pruned after flowers fade.

- Fertilize woody plants before new growth begins but wait until after soil temperature has reached 40 degrees. Two pounds of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet should be broadcast over the entire root area.

- Remove winter coverings from roses as soon as new growth begins, but keep mulch nearby for protection from late freezes. Prune and fertilize as needed.

- Apply superior oil spray to control scale insects and mites on landscape

plants and fruit trees when tips of leaves start to protrude from buds.

- Remove tree wrap from trunks to prevent scalding due to overheating of bark.

### Lawn

- Rake to remove leaves, twigs and trash.

- Mow lawn as needed. The first mowing should be slightly lower than normal to encourage green-up.

### Flowers, vegetables and small fruit

- Prepare garden soil for planting. Do not work the soil while it is wet. Soil should crumble when squeezed in your hand when it is ready to work. If soil forms a solid ball when squeezed in your hand, it's still too wet.

- Follow fall's soil test recommendations for fertilizer and pH adjustment. (It's not too late to test soil if you missed last year.)

- Start seeds of warm-season vegetables and flowers indoors.

- Watch for blooms of early-spring bulbs such as daffodils, crocus, dwarf iris, and snowdrops.

- Remove old asparagus and rhubarb tops, and then side dress with nitrogen or manure.

## COMMUNITY

### EVENTS

#### Vessel blessed by late pope to be displayed

A vessel used for exhibition of the Blessed Sacrament that was blessed by Pope John Paul II will be on display at Our Lady of the Greenwood Catholic Church beginning Thursday.

The vessel, called a monstrance, will be on exhibition in the church's Perpetual Adoration Chapel for three days.

The Blessed Sacrament will be exposed in the monstrance during Stations of the Cross at 7 p.m. Friday in the church. Benediction will follow. Afterward, Monsignor Mark Svarczkopf will give an explanation of a Latin prayer, the Pater Noster.

The monstrance also will be displayed during Eucharistic adoration at 7:30 p.m. March 11 at the church, 335 S. Meridian St.

#### Symphonic council hosts membership lunch

Franklin Symphonic Council will conduct its annual meeting and membership luncheon March 11 at Franklin College's Napolitan Student Center.

Lunch will be served at noon, and a style show will be presented by Talbots in Columbus.

A presentation will highlight the council's community activities and programs, and the council's founders will be celebrated.

Membership in the Franklin Symphonic Council helps support musical events, including the Fanfare and Fireworks concert each July as well as a free outdoor concert in June.

In addition, the council provides musical opportunities for young people in Franklin.

Tickets for the luncheon may be reserved by calling Jann Johnson, 738-8801, or Reba Goley, 535-8673.

#### Paster to celebrate 25 years with church

The Rev. Roger Gifford will celebrate his 25th anniversary as

pastor of First Christian Church in Bargersville on Sunday.

The congregation will honor Gifford with a day of celebration at the church, 101 East St., Bargersville.

A pitch-in meal will take place after the 11 a.m. service, followed by an open house until 2:30 p.m.

The community is invited. Gifford's ministry has extended beyond the Bargersville congregation.

As chaplain for the Bargersville Volunteer Fire Department and Johnson County Sheriff's Office, he has been available to counsel firefighters and victims of devastating fires.

Before hip-replacement surgery in 1999, he was an emergency medical technician and firefighter.

He serves in other chaplain roles on the southside, he says.

For many years he was a board member of the InterChurch Food Pantry.

A native of Dowagiac, Mich., he and his wife, Ann, have a son, Eric, and a daughter, Erin.

#### Activities offered at southside church

Mount Pleasant Christian Church offers the following programs:

- Registration for fitness Boot Camp, April 10 to May 8, continues through March 19. The camp meets four days a week from 5:15 to 6:15 a.m. in the church's parking lot at 381 N. Bluff Road, Greenwood.

Cost is \$50. Participants need to bring their own hand-held weights and water.

Registration forms are available online at [www.mount.org](http://www.mount.org), or call 881-672, Ext. 238, for more information.

- Registration for the next school year will take place from 6 to 8 p.m. Monday. Openings are available in all age groups from 12 months old through pre-kindergarten.

Registration fee is \$50. Information: 881-6727, Ext. 296

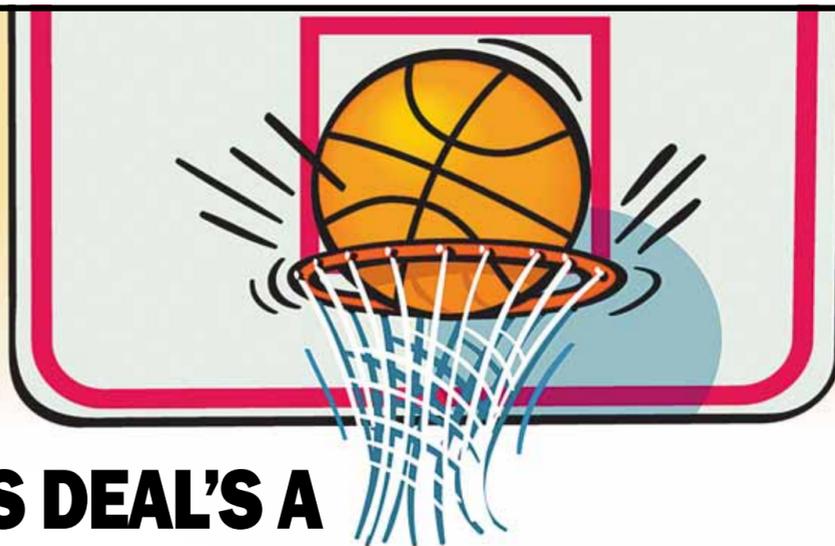


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Mt. Auburn Christian Children's Ministry annual

## OPEN HOUSE

Tuesday, March 7th, 2006  
6:30 to 8:00 pm

Registration is open for children six weeks old to 11 years old. We provide transportation to the following schools: Center Grove Schools, Sawmill Woods, Break-O-Day & Whiteland Elementary. We also offer 3's and 4's Preschool, Pre-Kindergarten and Full Day Kindergarten. Registration fees will be waived during Open House Night.



Mt. Auburn  
Christian Children's Ministry

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