

Wildlife Disturbances In Your Yard

Have you ever come across mysterious and unwanted holes or disturbances in your yard and wondered which animal was responsible for them? And, how to handle the situation?

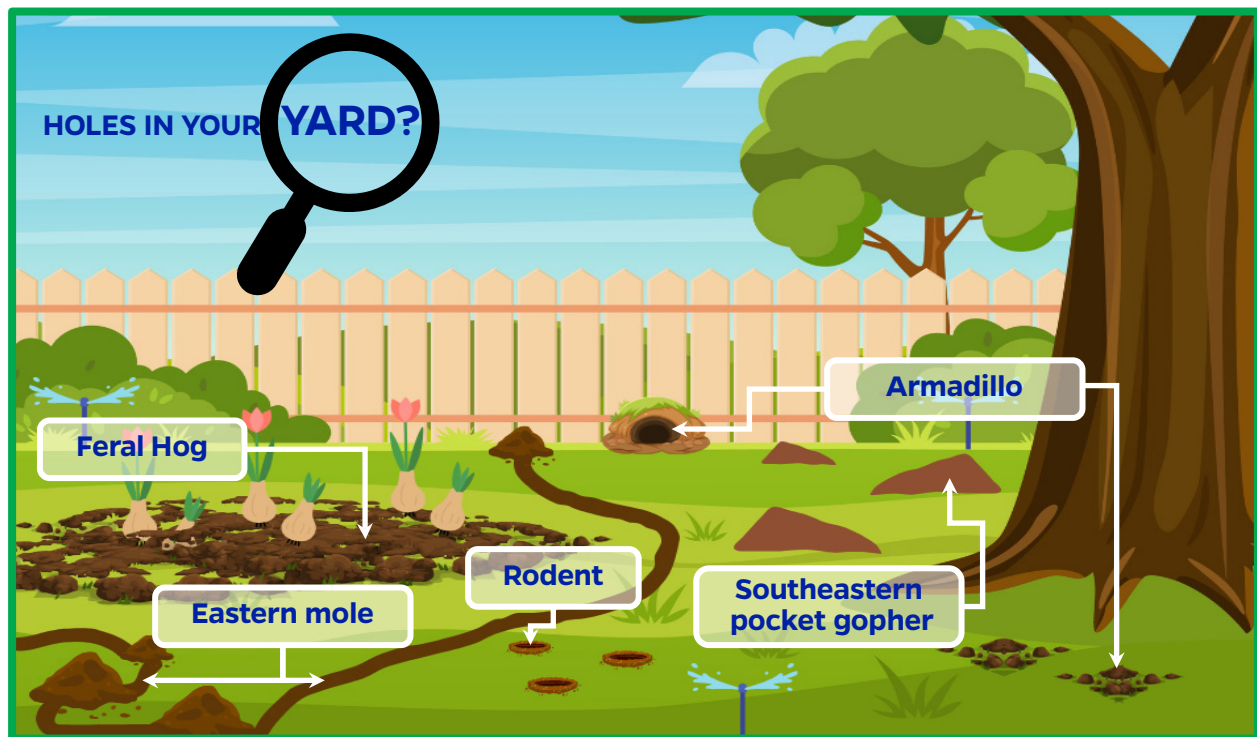
We can help.

Our “Neighborhood Best Practices” program provides tips and techniques on understanding and dealing with wildlife, along with efficient irrigation, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™, preserves, protecting our local waterways, creating community gardens, composting initiatives, and much more. Register online at tiny.cc/ufsaraext_nbp to make a difference in your neighborhood.

What Causes Wildlife To Dig In Yards?

Survival needs

Wildlife digging and burrowing is a normal behavior used to create shelter for protection from predators and weather conditions, to create suitable nests and dens for breeding, or to search for food such as insects, roots, tubers, and bulbs. Common human activities and behaviors can attract wildlife looking for food, shelter, and survival. It is important to determine what human activities can be modified to deter unwanted wildlife from using your yard, and identifying what species is present, before deciding how to address wildlife concerns.



Credit: Canva

Who Did It?

Identifying wildlife responsible for yard disturbances

Here are a few clues for identifying holes and disturbances in your yard:

- **Location:** Do you live in an urban or residential neighborhood, or close to a natural area? What type of soil or plant matter is involved? Is the disturbance near fencing, tree roots, structures, or a garden?
- **Size and shape:** how big is the hole or area of disturbance? What type of animals live in the area that fit the hole's shape and size?
- **Pattern:** is there one large hole, many small holes, or mounds of soil? Are there small or large patches of rooted, turned soil?
- **Tracks and scat:** do you see any footprints or “tracks” in the area? Any feces or “scat” left behind? Wildlife guidebooks or a quick internet search can help you match tracks and scat to an animal.



Wildlife Disturbances In Your Yard

(cont'd)

Common Wildlife Responsible For Yard Disturbances

Armadillo

- Food: insects, rotting fruit
- Burrow 7-8 inches wide, round, body-shaped
- Close to structures, fencing, or roots
- Several shallow feeding disturbances in the form of rooted or turned soil and grass close together

Southeastern pocket gopher

- Food: native grasses, roots, shrubs, tubers, roots and tubers of agricultural crops
- Extensive, below ground tunnel systems
- Lopsided mound of soil with a covered or sunken 3-inch-wide hole

Rodent species

- Food: varied diet, fallen fruits, nuts, seeds, grains, rotting foods and meats, etc.
- Smooth 2- to 3-inch-wide holes, single or few
- Runways: frequently traveled paths with rub marks and evidence of rodent presence

Gopher tortoise (threatened, protected species*)

- Food: low growing, native grasses and plants
- Burrow opening has a domed-top and flat bottom, corresponding to size of tortoise's shell
- Mound of sand called the apron, at the entrance of the burrow where eggs are laid

**Land within 25 feet of a burrow must be left undisturbed; may not be harassed or removed*

Feral hog

- Food: varied diet, plant matter, tubers, roots, bulbs, insects, small animals, crops
- Large patches of rooted soil that appears plowed
- Uprooted plants
- Shallow depressions in wet, muddy areas: "wallows"

Eastern mole

- Food: insects
- Small, symmetrical, cone shaped mounds of soil and paths of raised soil/earth
- Extensive, below ground tunnel systems and chambers

Wildlife that do not make holes

- Snakes: utilize holes made by other species to hunt and find shelter. Only a few species burrow.
- Rabbits: in Florida, rabbits usually create shallow depressions in grass rather than dens



*Gopher tortoise burrow (l) and scat.
Credit: Katherine Clements*



Prevention and Exclusion

Techniques to help deter wildlife from using your yard

1. **Secure potential food sources:** harvest ripe fruit, remove fallen fruit from the ground, securely contain garbage, remove fallen bird seed from the ground, and do not leave pet food outdoors.
2. **Soil management:** avoid overwatering, overirrigating, or overfertilizing your soil.
3. **Exclusion fencing:** install appropriate fencing with the right height to discourage animals from entering your property, or to protect especially vulnerable areas, such as a garden.

It is important to balance protecting human interests and respecting wildlife who face increasingly limited habitat.

Learn how to differentiate between when wildlife are a true nuisance, causing significant damage, or if you can learn to coexist.

Learn more "Neighborhood Best Practices"

- Register here: tiny.cc/ufsaraext_nbp
 - Follow us on social media for the latest tips:
Facebook.com/ufsarasotaext | Instagram.com/ufsarasotaextension | Twitter.com/ufsarasotaext
- Find more information at our websites: sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/sarasota and scgov.net/extension



Questions? sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/sarasota | sarasota@ifas.ufl.edu | **941.861.5000**