

FACT SHEET: Armadillos: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

LYNN BARBER, B.A., FLORIDA YARDS & NEIGHBORHOODS AGENT

(Adapted from Joe Schaefer's *Control of Armadillos*, UF/IFAS Extension, Fact Sheet SS-WEC-76)

These generally unwanted yard pets have shield-like shells, are poor sighted and hearing hampered, but they have a keen sense of smell. Armadillos are agile runners, good swimmers, and even have the ability to walk underwater across small streams. They inhabit dense, shady covered areas and prefer sandy loam soils that are easy to excavate.

The Good: Armadillos feed primarily on insects and their larvae. They eat earthworms, scorpions, spiders, snails, cockroaches, ants, wasps, flies, beetles and grasshoppers and have dug up entire yellow-jacket nests. They are remarkably free of parasites. Every downside has an upside: you can view the armadillo's digging as soil aeration....yeah, right!

The Bad: Usually, an armadillo's food search involves rooting or digging in the ground. The holes are typically 1-3 inches deep and 3-5 inches wide, which can uproot flowers and ornamental plants. Armadillo burrows under driveways and patios can result in structural damage. By day, armadillos rest in deep burrows that are 7-8 inches in diameter and up to 15 feet long. Several borrows are created throughout their territory, but they use only one to raise their young, which consists of 1 litter per year of 4 identical young of the same sex. Armadillos become more active during late evening or early morning hours.

The Ugly: These prehistoric-looking mammals are not the prettiest sight to behold. The biggest predator of armadillos is the automobile. The ugly part of this is the 'watermelon' left on the road. (My sister always referred to road kill as watermelons. It was easier for her to handle it that way!)

Using insecticides to decrease the armadillo food supply is not guaranteed, but may help reduce the digging. However, in some cases, this may increase activity as they search more diligently for a smaller food supply. No chemical treatment will eliminate all soil-contained food sources, and all chemical treatments have to be reapplied on a permanent basis for impact. Before applying any insecticide, contact the Hillsborough County Cooperative Extension office to determine the appropriate chemicals. And, always read and follow label instructions for safe use.

Because armadillos are nocturnal, trapping techniques designed to capture armadillos emerging from burrows should be applied late in the afternoon and checked several hours after darkness. Other options to discourage the presence of armadillos include fencing (with pre-approval from your Homeowners' Association) and live-trapping. Several live-trapping techniques can be used to capture armadillos as they come out of their burrows. One method is to firmly insert a 6-inch diameter PVC pipe into the entrance of an active burrow. Adult armadillos will get stuck in the pipe as they try to exit. Another option involves a nylon throw-net used for fishing that can be staked down to cover the burrow entrance. Armadillos will get tangled in the net as they emerge. Some can be discouraged from returning to burrows by filling the hole with a mixture of dirt and mothballs after you are sure they have left for the night. Laying chicken-wire along a patio, driveway or house foundation will also discourage them from burrowing. Armadillos can also be trapped using a raccoon-sized metal trap, available from local pest control and feed stores. Suggested baits for the trap are live earthworms

or meal worms in surrounding soil placed in hanging bags made of old nylon stockings. Other suggested baits are overripe or spoiled fruit. Armadillos are more likely to enter a cage trap with leaf litter or soil placed over the wire bottom.

Relocating problem animals is not recommended because it only transfers the problem elsewhere and can spread disease. Poison baits are illegal and ineffective. No chemical repellents or fumigants are registered for use in Florida.

Back to The Good: Look how aerated your soil has become thanks to the presence of your new landscape guests!

For assistance with horticultural questions, call the Master Gardener Help Desk at the Hillsborough County Extension Service, located in Seffner: 813 744-5519 X7. More gardening information is available at <http://hillsborough.extension.ufl.edu> and <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>