



## Fact sheet - Creating your Flora for Fauna Garden

# Dealing with unwelcome visitors

Information courtesy: Gould League, [www.gould.edu.au](http://www.gould.edu.au)

- ▶ Introduced birds
- ▶ Birds nesting in the roof
- ▶ Aggressive native birds
- ▶ Brushtail Possums
- ▶ Cats
- ▶ Rats

## Introduced birds

Introduced birds such as Blackbirds, Starlings, Sparrows and Indian Mynahs were introduced to Australia over 150 years ago and are now a common sight in suburban backyards.

*Blackbirds* were introduced from Europe and Asia and were first released in Victoria in 1864. They were later released in South Australia, Tasmania and NSW. They are still only found in these states.

*Starlings* were also introduced to Australia in the 1860s and are now a major pest. They are robust competitors with our native birds for food and nesting hollows and have spread throughout the eastern states (Tas., NSW, Vic, Qld.SA and ACT).

*Indian Mynahs* have also spread throughout eastern Australia. They were introduced to control insect pests in the late 1800s. These birds will eat insects, meat, berries and seeds and most other things!. They are extremely aggressive towards native birds.

*House Sparrows* were introduced in the 1860s and are also a pest species. They compete with native birds for nesting hollows and crevices. They are spread over much of Eastern Australia including eastern parts of the Northern Territory.





Typical English gardens with open lawns tend to favour Blackbirds, Indian Mynas, Sparrows and Starlings. It's not an easy task to discourage these birds, but the following tips will help:

- ▶ Grow lots of native plants including trees, shrubs and grasses and fewer non-native plants particularly trees.
- ▶ Have smaller areas of lawn and more ground cover plants and mulch.
- ▶ Don't feed birds bread or large amounts of seed.

You may not get rid of all the introduced birds, but you can quickly make your garden less friendly for them.

## **Birds nesting in the roof**

Never feel guilty about denying a pigeon, sparrow or starling a nesting site. They will make a smelly, dirty mess and nesting material dragged into eaves by sparrows and starlings has caused many homes to burn during bush fires.

Remove any nesting material (wear gloves) where the birds have been nesting and close over the hole where they enter.

To prevent pigeons roosting, place rows of exposed nails pointed upwards (fixed to wood). This will prevent the birds from finding a place to rest. Enclose the area or cover the area with fishing net or similar. It might sound like considerable work, but will probably be worth the effort.

If you have a Welcome Swallow nesting under an eave leaving unwelcome droppings below, the solution is simple. Nail or glue a small tray below the nest to catch all the droppings.

## **Aggressive native birds**

Some of the larger native birds such as Wattlebirds can be very aggressive to smaller birds. If you want to discourage bullying in your backyard, plant lots of thick, prickly shrubs such as Bursaria, Acacias and Hakeas. This provides shelter (as well as a source of berries, insects and seeds) and enables the little guys to escape. Planting several thickets in the garden is best. Make sure you avoid putting bird food out as this also encourages the aggressive birds to stay around longer.





## Possums

We should consider ourselves lucky that at least one marsupial enjoys our company! However, most of us aren't impressed to find a Brushtail Possum at home in our roof space or devouring newly planted shrubs.

Brushtail Possums love the flowers and shrubs in suburban gardens and enjoy the shelter provided by suburban roofs and wall cavities! Across the Tasman, Brushtail Possums are introduced pests – spreading disease and destroying native forests. In Australia, Brushtail Possums are part of Australia's native wildlife and are protected by law. Ringtail Possums tend to be less of a problem as they build their straggly nests in trees.

If you have an unwelcome possum, there are a couple of ways to encourage them to find a tree:

- ▶ Try and find where the possum is entering and close the opening. Do this at night when the possum is out foraging.
- ▶ Remove any branches that will assist the possum from climbing onto your roof.
- ▶ A nesting box on a tree sometimes helps.
- ▶ In some states, if a possum is caught and injured, a vet must put it down.
- ▶ Some small hyperactive, yappy, dogs in the garden at night can discourage possums, but the dog can then become more of a problem than the possum.

If Brushtail Possums are destroying your plants – here's a solution from Melbourne Zoo...

*“ Several Lilly Pillies were planted as part of the front entrance redevelopment. They suffered major possum damage. The solution was chillies ..more specifically..Tabasco Sauce. The plants were sprayed with a diluted Tabasco mixture – and obviously once bitten, twice shy – the possums left them alone from then on.”*

Some other solutions include: metal guards around mature trees and floppy fences around smaller plants.





Trapping and releasing possums away from your backyard – is usually only a temporary solution as the ‘vacant real estate’ will usually be occupied soon after by another Brushtail Possum.

For more information on possums and what you can do, talk to your local Council. They will be able to advise you about wildlife legislation and provide ideas on dealing with possums around your home and in your garden.

## Cats

For some gardens, these unwanted intruders are a constant irritation and many cats harrass and kill small birds and reptiles. There is little that can be done to stop a cat entering your garden other than squirting it with a hose and visiting the owner asking that the cat be kept indoors. Some cat owners place bells around their cat’s neck – however this will not always warn unsuspecting birds as cats can slowly stalk their prey without even a tinkle from the bell.

Planting thickets of prickly shrubs provides birds and lizards with places to escape. If you have bird baths, or lizard sunning spots in your garden, make sure they near these thickets so that animals can’t be ambushed and can make a quick escape.

## Rats

Most gardens have mice annually and rats every three to five years. Black Rats are good climbers and will make their way into your roof. The Brown Rat, which is larger, burrows. You know you have rats when you either hear scratching in the roof, find burrows in the chook pen, and burrows in the compost bin or spot a little brown animal feeding in the bird feeder at night.

Rat burrows underneath a compost bin will often provide an early warning sign and adding rat bait to a compost bin can provide a quick resolution to the problem. Rat bait can be placed in your garden but *must be* out of reach of children, wildlife and pets.

