

Living with Opossums



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General information

Virginia opossums (*Didelphis virginiana*), often simply known as possums, are common throughout Florida in urban, suburban and rural areas. Opossums are Florida's only marsupial, meaning they raise their young in a pouch, like a koala or kangaroo. They have pale to dark grey fur, a hairless prehensile (grasping) tail, and opposable thumbs that can grip like a human's thumb. They are mostly nocturnal but may be active during the day, which is normal behavior and not necessarily a sign of illness.



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Opossums are slow-moving animals who use unusual defense methods. If they are threatened, they will hiss, drool, growl and try to bluff their way out of the situation. If they continue to feel threatened, they may play dead, entering a catatonic state where they fall on their side completely limp with decreased breathing and heart rate and possibly a foul smell. If an opossum appears to be dead, do not try to pick it up. It is possibly just playing dead to escape a larger predator (you or your pets). Leave it alone or use a shovel to gently move it to a quiet spot, and in a few minutes or up to several hours the opossum will most likely "wake up" and leave on its own.

Opossums are opportunistic feeders. This means they will eat whatever is available to them at the time, from plants and animals to garbage. Opossums are beneficial to people and the environment in several ways. They perform cleanup functions much like a vulture, including eating dead and decaying animals. Adult opossums can eat venomous snakes because they are at least partly immune to snake venom. They also eat ticks that attach to their fur when they groom themselves, which may reduce the number of ticks in an area.

What can you do to reduce conflicts with opossums?

- Secure trash, outdoor pet food, bird seed and dropped fruit from trees in the yard to help reduce visits by opossums.
- Secure chickens and their nests at night to prevent opossums from eating the sleeping birds or eggs.
- Prevent opossums and other wildlife from denning underneath structures by closing off access points and other openings.
- If opossums are living under your home, you can place a motion-activated water sprinkler near the entrance while they are away for the night to deter re-entry. Once you are sure they are all out, repair exterior screens and block vents with wire mesh to keep opossums out of your home.
- For horse owners, opossums are one of the primary species that shed the protozoan that causes EPM (*Equine Protozoal Myeloencephalitis*). To reduce risk of infection, feed horses in elevated buckets or bins, keep water sources well cleaned, tightly cover grain bins and exclude wildlife from hay storage. Keeping a clean barn is the best protection; it is not necessary to kill opossums on sight.



Regulatory status

The opossum is a native species with a year-round hunting and trapping season here in Florida. You can find hunting and trapping regulations at [MyFWC.com/Hunting](https://myfwc.com/hunting). An opossum can be taken as a nuisance animal if it causes or is about to cause property damage, presents a threat to public safety, or causes an annoyance in, under, or upon a building per Florida rule 68A-9.010.

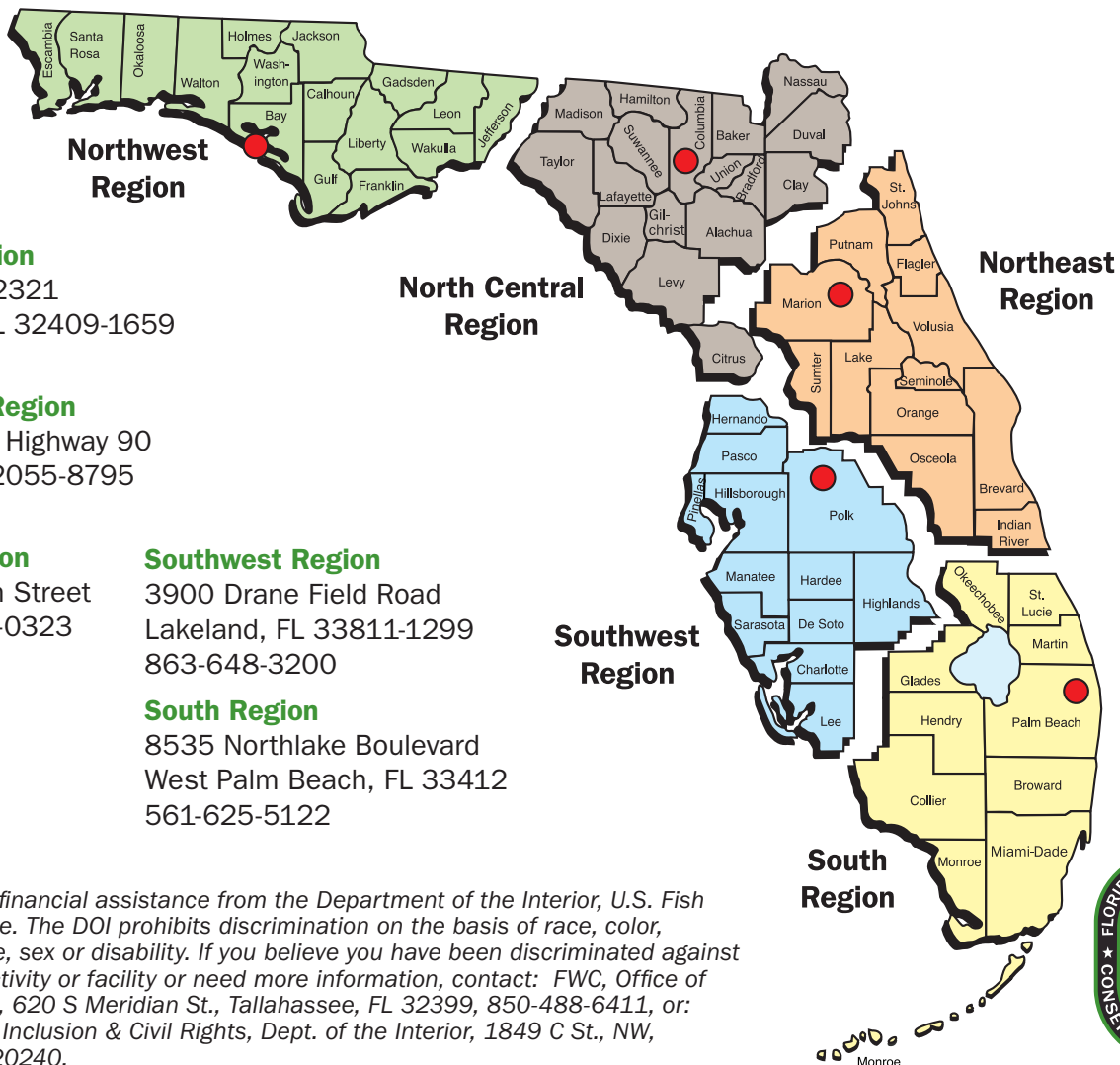
Legal options to take nuisance opossum

Opossums are beneficial because they control populations of insects, rodents and other animals. It is best to prevent problems with opossums by securing attractants and deterring them from sleeping under residences. Removing one or more opossums does not prevent others from using the same areas in the future. However, if an opossum is a nuisance, it can be captured or killed using legal and humane methods.

- Nuisance wildlife, as defined in Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.) 68A-9.010, may be taken using live traps or snares or, where allowed, firearms during daylight hours.
- Nuisance opossums can be taken with a firearm on private property during daylight hours with landowner permission. Please check with the local police department or sheriff's office for firearm ordinances before discharging a firearm. A [Gun and Light at Night Permit](#) is required to shoot opossums at night.
- Steel traps may only be used for opossums with an approved steel trap permit. Call your regional FWC office for assistance.

Please note: All traps must be checked at least once every 24 hours. Captured non-target species are required to be released on site. All live-captured opossums must be humanely killed, released on-site, or released on a property within the same county of capture that is 40 acres or larger with written permission from the landowner.

If you have further questions or need more help, call your regional Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission office:



Northwest Region

3911 Highway 2321
Panama City, FL 32409-1659
850-265-3676

North Central Region

3377 East U.S. Highway 90
Lake City, FL 32055-8795
386-758-0525

Northeast Region

1239 S.W. 10th Street
Ocala, FL 3441-0323
352-732-1225

Southwest Region

3900 Drane Field Road
Lakeland, FL 33811-1299
863-648-3200

South Region

8535 Northlake Boulevard
West Palm Beach, FL 33412
561-625-5122

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