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There are times when wild animals take a shine to human habitat, creating a situation ripe for conflict. Tipped trash cans, skunk-sprayed dogs and ravaged chicken coops are indicative of nuisance wildlife. Humans play a role in promoting these troubling behaviours when we inadvertently invite animals into our living spaces. Food rewards remain the number one cause of problematic animals, but there are other reasons, as well.

The raccoon, or “trash panda,” frequently lands on the Naughty List. Intelligent, adaptable and curious, it can open latches, door knobs and jars and climbs like a pro. Easily accessed garbage, pet food and bird feeders serve as open-all-night diners. The close proximity of available food to a good den site also appeals to the female raccoon, and she may eyeball your structures for her nursery. Eliminating food sources is the first step to deterrence. Secure garbage in a heavy trash can with a secure lid, and consider fastening it to a post with a bungee. Feed pets indoors, or be sure to bring all bowls in before dark. Hang bird feeders from a thin wire cable stretched between trees or use skinny shepherd’s hooks. Rake up any fallen fruit or nuts from backyard trees. A simple fence around your garden or chicken coop will not keep raccoons out, but adding a single strand of electrified wire can help keep these areas secure. Place the wire 8 inches above the ground and 8 inches out from the base of the existing fence, and keep it activated from dusk to dawn. Prune branches overhanging the roofline, and remove trellises that lean against the house. Experts recommend putting a screen or appropriate cap over your chimney. Lastly, block off any entry sites into the attic, barn or shed, which make desirable den sites.

Skunk neighbours can be pungently problematic. Many of the same precautions mentioned above will also help deter Stinker Bell. Using gravel, plywood or fencing, block all holes and potential burrow sites under an elevated house, porch, deck, etc. Also, remove large brush piles from your yard.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, especially when the pounds belong to a food-conditioned black bear. Once rewarded with a tasty meal, a bear keeps coming back. Be sure to remove or secure the usual food attractants. Also, after using your BBQ grill, scrape off food residue and burn it clean. Dispose of drip can grease or store it indoors -- along with citronella candles -- until the next cook out. Composting may attract a bear. Never compost meat, fish, oil, grease or dairy products, and cover kitchen waste with dried grass or leaves. Salt and mineral livestock licks can attract a bear, too. Protect gardens and bee hives with electric fencing. A mowed and weed-free lawn is less appealing to a bear. Never leave groceries, trash or other aromatic items in your vehicle or its trunk. The smell of some petroleum products like gasoline may draw a bear in to your yard. Store them somewhere safe and secure.

A coyote can be discouraged by tall fencing or motion-sensor lights. Clean up after your dog, as a coyote is attracted by dog waste. It will mate with domestic dogs, so spay and neuter your pet to avoid an unwanted coyote suitor. Keep cats and pet rabbits indoors unless supervised.

Where nuisance wildlife is a genuine problem, a neighbourhood endeavor may be helpful, because the most diligent preparation at one home will lose effectiveness if wildlife attractants remain nearby.