

Badgers in your Garden

Last Updated Friday, 02 March 2012

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General

It is very natural to welcome an unusual and lovely wild animal into your garden, and put out some food to encourage it to stay. The trouble is, it will come to rely on you, and if you stop putting out food it will search for alternatives in what has become familiar territory, or on neighbouring premises. So, if you are not prepared for this possibility, or of being out of favour with your neighbours, do not encourage badgers to begin with, however tempting it may be.

Badgers may also visit your garden if your house has been built on what was originally badger territory: a new housing estate can have problems later, as they may try to return. They are creatures of habit and, when they can, will go back to their old homes when all is peaceful again. Golf courses are also favourite areas for food, and it is wise for a survey to be done before turfing. Constant watering will attract worms to the surface, and badgers will make a hasty bee-line for them.

Badger Groups will advise on methods of persuading badgers to find other feeding grounds where possible. Sometimes the trouble is only seasonal, and after a few weeks the problem may decrease. Holes under garden sheds are usually seasonal in this way. Licences must be granted by DEFRA for any work which may entail the actual persuasion of a badger to dig its sett entrances elsewhere, or to abandon a sett entirely. Both the badger and its sett are protected by law, and it is illegal to interfere with either. Unfortunately there is no legal chemical deterrent available now. Members of the public may have heard of Renardine, but that was made illegal in March 2005. What also cannot be done, as it is against the law, is for badgers to be caged and taken elsewhere.

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If you have made an enquiry about your problem, you may have been advised as follows.

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If you feed the birds, remove any food left over at night.

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In the fruit season, badgers love 'drops' from fruit trees, so collect them and feed them to the badgers where they are coming in, or put the 'drops' away elsewhere.

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If you have a compost heap, could it be contained or covered?

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If you do not have a wheelie-bin, put your rubbish bags out in the morning, especially in hot, dry, summers when other sources of food may be limited. They attract all manner of animals and birds if left out overnight.

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In dry weather a pond will attract a variety of wildlife. If you are sure a badger is visiting, put a dish of water by the hole in the fence - it may drink there and go away.

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The movement of strips of kitchen foil on canes can make badgers uneasy, as can the windmills bought for children. Putting them randomly in your lawn may deter them.

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If you water your lawn it brings the worms to the surface, and as badgers feed mostly on worms it will attract them. This is the reason for snuffle holes appearing in your lawn.

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At night, when there is a moon, fill empty water bottles with tap water, and lay them on the lawn. The refraction makes badgers uncomfortable, as the moon reflects on the water.

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If you are still stuck with a lawn looking like a battlefield, this is where the matter of lawn care throughout the year comes into play.

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Lawn Care

The main reason badgers dig up turf is to get at the grubs in the grass roots. The presence of insect larvae such as those of the cockchafer and crane-fly (leatherjacket) can themselves damage lawns, but also attract badgers. Generally damage is seasonal, but the result can be devastating. The crane-fly larvae retreat deep into the ground as the soil gets colder in the winter, so they are only available to the badger in spring, possibly during summer if the soil is damp, and peaking again in the autumn.

Good lawn care will result in no grubs, but it is an ongoing process. The female crane-fly will find a fine, manicured lawn much less attractive for egg laying than a neglected, mossy one. Spike your lawn to improve the drainage, top dressing with sand by sweeping it into the holes. Disturb the lawn surface by raking with a lawn-rake - female crane-flies prefer not to lay their eggs in disturbed soil. If the lawn is mossy, it is most important to rake it over every week during August and September, when the eggs are laid. Disturb other areas in your garden at this time as well, to deter the female's egg laying search.

There are other short-term measures for getting rid of the grubs.

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An organic method is to lay down some black polythene, held down with bricks, on the wet lawn overnight. In the morning the grubs should have moved to the surface and can either be swept up and put on the bird table, or left for the birds to eat if they are around at the time.

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Biological control can be by the use of nematodes, microscopic worms, appearing as a grey powder, used as a drench. The products containing them must be used at the right times of the year as they cannot survive frosts. This is also an environmentally friendly method.

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Chemical removal. Try to only use a product which is targeted at these grubs and does not kill other insects, especially worms which are beneficial to the garden. They aerate the soil, so are a help in improving your lawn.

One way of deterring badgers from your lawn is to give them an alternative. Badgers slurp up the worms there and only dig around in long, dry periods. At times like this you could try to distract them by feeding them yourself. Leave out some water in an upturned dustbin lid or any receptacle sunk into the ground, peanuts, fruit, honey sandwiches or any food scraps, and perhaps they will leave your lawn alone. But do not feed them too much or they may become dependent on you, or bring other badgers and still have a go at your lawn.

As Renardine is no longer available, there is no substance at present licensed to be used as a deterrent. If you have a sett in your garden, do not put anything down, near, or in it - this is against the law. If you are needing to protect a lawn, a vegetable patch, or a particular part of your garden, two or three-strand electrical fencing could be an answer. This can be placed low down, so it is not unsightly, and not the orange net fencing used for sheep or chickens. It need only be turned on at night and can either be run off the mains (through a transformer), or by battery. It can be purchased at agricultural merchants.

It is natural for you to resent the badger for your lawn looking the

way it does after hard work, and possibly expensive attention to the garden itself. But remember that badgers are good pest controllers, and their digging of lawns indicates there is a problem with grubs eating the grass roots. They eat many other pests, slugs and snails, mice, rats, rabbits, and even wasps. But if you are still troubled by them, contact your local badger group (details on back page) and ask for a visit from a member near you, who may be able to make further suggestions by seeing the problem on the spot. However, we can only advise, and sometimes problems cannot be solved, although we do the best we can for everyone who asks.

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