

Living with Woodpeckers

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I inspected a home in Niwot recently and it had damage from the local woodpeckers. The buyers ask me if there were any foolproof way of getting rid of them. Outside of using a gun (noisy and illegal in Colorado) there are a few things you can do. Woodpeckers drill into trees, wood surfaces and other stucco materials to find food and to build nests in the cavities they create. They have strong, sharp beaks and a long tongue. Their sharp claws and stiff tail feathers enable them to cling to vertical surfaces. Most woodpecker damage occurs during the period of breeding and territory establishment (February through June). Woodpecker damage on homes consists of holes they peck in search of insects and for nest cavities into wood portions of homes. Damage has also been observed on synthetic siding, synthetic roofing materials, and elevated irrigation tubing. Other complaints are a result of woodpeckers drumming. Drumming consists of pecking in a rapid, rhythmic succession on resonant surfaces, such as wood siding, chimney caps, and light standards.

Woodpeckers are like humans; once a habit begins it is very hard to break. Thus, begin control measures as soon as the problem begins. Do not wait until a pattern develops. Once you begin using a control tactic, continue for at least 3 days before changing to another control. The most effective control measures for woodpeckers include exclusion and frightening. Netting and metal sheeting or hardware cloth are used for exclusion. Plastic bird netting with a 3/4-inch mesh can be



placed completely over small trees or used to exclude birds from surfaces. To protect a surface, netting should be raised at least 3 inches from the surface to prevent damage through the mesh. Woodpeckers often peck at the top of walls near the roof eaves. Protect these areas by attaching the netting to the edge of the eave, angling it back, and attaching it to the wall below the damaged area. Metal sheeting or 1/4 inch hardware cloth can be secured over pecked areas to prevent further damage. The metal barrier should be painted to resemble the existing surface. Once the offending birds are gone, the holes should be permanently filled and finished so as not to attract woodpeckers in the future. Visual frightening devices, such as brightly colored plastic, Mylar strips, or aluminum foil, have been effective at repelling woodpeckers. Use strips about 2-3 inches wide and 3 feet long. Tie a 6-inch string to one end of a strip. Tie the other string end 2-3 feet above the damaged area so the strips hang freely. The movement of these bright, reflective strips often frightens the birds away. Some success at repelling woodpeckers have been achieved with life-sized, freely moving hawk silhouettes or the "Scary-Eye" balloons (balloons painter with large raptor-like eyes), especially if their positions are moved frequently however in our high winds these balloons may not last. Sticky repellents like Roost-No-More®, Tanglefoot® and Bird Stop® can also be effective when smeared on the trunk and branches of high value trees and wood siding.

There is no "cookbook" approach to dealing with woodpeckers. Evaluate each individual situation separately to determine the most effective, inexpensive control measures. Often more than one technique (for example, using both visual and sound repellents) may provide the best control. If all of these tactics fail, contact the local Fish and Wildlife Service office for additional help.

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