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SNAKES AND THEIR CONTROL

During the springtime we see many plants, insects, animals, and snakes come out from dormancy and they can sometimes cause us problems. If you are scared of snakes like I am they can cause severe problems. Although in Texas there are not many poisonous species of snakes, treat all of them as if they were.

There are many different kinds of snakes in Texas but only rattlesnakes, copperheads, cottonmouths, and coral snakes are poisonous and should be avoided. In our area we mainly have to contend with copperheads and cottonmouths, both of which are very dangerous and can sometimes be aggressive.

Like other reptiles, snakes are cold-blooded animals; their body temperature is regulated by climatic conditions. As most of you know, snakes cannot tolerate extreme cold and they will hibernate during the winter months, and emerge from their dens in late February to early March. This is why we are seeing so many right now.

The greatest danger to people is the possibility of being bitten by a poisonous snake. The best way to prevent snake bites is to learn how to recognize the poisonous ones and keep away from rocky or brushy areas where they are likely to be.

All poisonous snakes in Texas, except the coral snake, belong to a group known as pit vipers. This includes rattlesnakes, copperheads, and cottonmouths. Pit vipers can be distinguished from non-poisonous snakes by the following characteristics:

1. Pit vipers have elliptical pupils. Non-poisonous snakes have round pupils. Don't however, look a live snake in the eye to see if he is poisonous or not.
2. Pit vipers have a loreal pit located between the eye and the nostril. Non-poisonous snakes do not have this pit.
3. Pit vipers have one row of scales on the tail under-surface between the vent and the tip of the tail. Non-poisonous snakes have two rows of scales.

I have had several calls asking how to control snakes around the house. Since there are no chemical controls or toxicants to repel snakes, the best method is to eliminate their shelters.

Eliminating rock piles, brush piles, tall grass, etc., will cause snakes to seek a more suitable habitat. Store lumber and wood piles at least 18 inches off the ground. Controlling insect and rodent population in the area will also help discourage snakes by eliminating their food source.

You also need to be cautious when going outside on porches and patios. During the summer months snakes will take shelter on these type places because they are cool. They love to crawl up on concrete or damp wood that is in shady areas because of the coolness.

When around water you need to use extreme caution. Teach your kids not to just traipse around a farm pond without looking for potential snakes. Water loving snakes will hang around the edge of the pond in tall grass, weeds, or brush, making them very hard to see. Keep the banks and water edges clean in a farm pond and this will help snakes at a minimum.

I get many calls during this time of year about snakes in the home. Be extremely cautious if you find snakes in your home. Use a long handled hoe to kill them, but be very careful. Snakes can jump about $\frac{1}{2}$ the length of their body. So if you have a 4 foot snake he can jump about 2 feet. You can also catch them by using glue traps. Connect several glue traps together and put them next to a wall where snakes generally travel.

Again, whichever method you use be extremely cautious.