



Woodpeckers

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Current trends in home building have significantly increased problems of woodpecker damage.

Woodpeckers damage buildings by "drumming" to attract females and by drilling holes in their search for insects and nesting sites. Woodpecker damage is most likely to occur in spring and fall, but spring is the biggest damage season. They are attracted to houses because of their large size and better sound production, especially those with wooden siding, eaves, or trim boards made of cedar or redwood. The new synthetic stucco materials being applied over Styrofoam insulation also are proving to be popular with these birds.

The key to successful control is to take action as soon as a woodpecker shows signs of becoming a pest. If it is allowed to establish its behavior pattern, it will become much more difficult to stop.

If the bird is merely drumming, you can eliminate the drumming noise by deadening the resonant area. Fill the hollow space with caulk.

If the woodpecker is creating holes in a search for food, your first step in eliminating the problem is to check for signs of insect infestation. If insects are found, you will want to consult with a licensed pest control operator on how to remove the insects and eliminate future infestations. If you can't find any insects, try some of these other techniques:

CONTROLS

- **Distraction.** Providing a feeder full of suet may entice the birds away from your home or birdfeeder.
- **Exclusion.** Woodpeckers may be excluded from some surfaces by covering them with plastic or lightweight nylon mesh, metal sheathing or hardware cloth. Metallic or wooded surfaces used for drumming may be wrapped or covered with cloth or foam to mute the sound. An alternative tapping site or surface such as a wooden box

hung nearby in a less annoying location may be considered.

- **Visual Repellants.** Using visual repellents may also chase the birds away.
 - Attach aluminum foil strips, 2-3 inches across and 2-3 feet long, above the targeted site. The strips should hang freely and move with the breeze. The motion should frighten the birds away.
 - Attach hand-held pinwheels (children's' toys) at the site with nails, pins or tape so that the revolving vanes are able to move freely.
 - Attach a magnifying shaving mirror at the site. The bird may be frightened off by his own reflection.
 - Colorful balloons hung near the area and allowed to move freely may frighten the birds. Commercially available inflatable owls, hawks and snakes are also available at most garden shops.
- **Noise.** Sound also can be used to harass offending woodpeckers.
 - Light pie plates and metal can lids can be suspended on a string and attached to the house near the damaged or drumming site. One end of the string can be near a convenient window or door where the line can be jerked to create noise when the bird is spotted.
 - Other noise, such as from banging pans, boards, or clapping hands may also chase birds away.
 - Place a loud-playing radio in a nearby window.
 - The playing of recorded calls of birds of prey may be used to augment the threat of inflatable models of owls and hawks. Also, vocalizations of woodpecker distress calls (available from sporting good stores) played for short, irregular intervals on continuous loop tapes have reportedly been used successfully.
- **Repellants.**
 - Treatment of the siding with pentachlorophenol or other wood preservatives seems to repel woodpeckers as well as providing insecticidal and wood-care benefits.
 - Sticky, paste-type repellents applied in the damaged area and for several feet on either side have been effective but may melt and run in hot weather causing stains to building materials. The birds are not trapped by these substances but dislike the tacky footing.
 - Commercial products, available at home and garden shops, have objectionable tastes and odors and may discourage woodpeckers.

Photographs courtesy of USDA and USGS.

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