

Wally's Weekly News 23rd January 2010
Written by Wally Richards.

FRIENDS OR FOES?

Gardens can be blessed or cursed by our four legged friends and the winged ones, dependant on your own attitude to the pleasure or harm that they may contribute. We are talking about dogs, cats, hedgehogs, chickens and other bird life wild or in captivity.

Dogs are mankind's best friend, loyal, loving and devoted to a caring family. They are best owned in pairs of either opposite or same sex and should ideally live indoors with their two legged family especially during the night. Pairs should be obtained ideally as puppies and then they will learn to be part of the whole family including any other pets. Obtaining adult dogs can be a bit more disruptive dependant on their previous experiences.

The problems they may give a gardener are digging and toileting.

The first rule is to never work in your gardens while a puppy or dog is around, unless they are high, raised gardens or containers. They may watch you planting, making holes and then later on, with all good intentions, repeat the process for you. Unfortunately they usually make holes where you do not want them to do so.

Dogs should be given meaty bones regularly for their enjoyment and health of their teeth and jaws.

Dogs have a habit of burying excess bones for later consumption so always remove any bones after they have chewed on them, it will save you another problem of dug up gardens.

Likely the worst problem is urine and the damage it will do to plants or lawns.

The first dog pee of the morning is one of the best natural weedkillers you could wish for that is of course if they directed it to offending weeds rather than onto your row of petunias.

There is always a solution to every problem and so if you make a small bark garden area with a pole or two in the area (for the male dogs), fenced off completely, from the rest of the section for their first toilet of the day. On arising take them directly to their toilet area and wait till they have done their business.

You may need to put them on a lead to reach the area and once inside remove the lead.

During the day the same area should be open to allow them access.

One of the best breeds of dogs for good behaviour aspects would be Shar Pei and I currently have 4 of them and several now past on over the last 20 odd years.

Cats are also great companions to many but much more independent in their natures than dogs.

I currently feed two feral cats at my back door, both females which I have caught and had spayed to prevent the multitude of kittens they can produce. They serve me a great purpose, ridding the rat problem that I had experienced in the past and keeping the mice populations at bay.

They also have reduced bird damage to tomatoes and other fruit and yet there are good populations of birds here. (I think they are well enough fed not to hunt for food) They do not harm my chickens either and in fact are a bit scared of them especially the rooster.

I also have a kitten from one of the feral litters which is now an adult girl and spayed

also.

I was amazed that she was able to settle in with my four Shar Pei who love to chase anything that runs, in fact she teases them every now and then. Been originally feral she lives in two manners, indoors loving and sleeping but will spend much time in the wild of the area.

Cats are a problem for many gardeners and often it is the cats from other houses that come to toilet in your freshly worked beds.

There are solutions for this such as having either your own dominate, territorial cat to keep others away or a dog that loves chasing cats to protect the section.

The next alternative is to sprinkle naphthalene flakes around areas where you do not want cats to go.

The flakes are sold by mail order from Garden gloves, **Cat Repellent**.

The smell is the same as moth balls and appear to be about 95% effective in deterring cats.

If used in food crop areas then do not place on the soil as they are a chemical, instead place in lids.

As the flakes evaporate they can sting the cat's eyes and they do not like the smell. (I think that the cats may believe that there is a monster cat around and the smell is from its toilets so they give the treated area a wide berth.) In dry areas the flakes will last for sometime before the need to refresh in areas that are rained on, more frequent applications will be needed. They also will keep a lot of other vermin away such as rats, mice, moths and cockroaches.

For cats that take no notice of the flakes then try soaking used tea bags in citronella oil and scattering these around.

Hedgehogs are a blessing and you are fortunate if you have a nest nearby, they will hunt out slugs and snails in the evening and solve another pest gardening problem for you.

Put out a dish of milk for them on the odd evening. They can suffer from mange caused by mites and result in skin problems and loss of quills. Catch the effected ones and powder them with sulphur or wash then in a diluted solution of **Neem Oil**. By the way **Neem Oil** added to your dog bath water will control fleas. The same can be used on either cats or dogs by soaking a cloth in **Neem Oil** and rubbing this over them. Also great for nit control.

Birds are great to have in your gardens as they enhance the atmosphere with their bird song and will assist in the control of garden pests.

The problem arises when fruit are ripening and they start pecking it.

There are several methods that can be employed to save a good amount of fruit for yourselves.

Firstly most fruit as it is starting to ripen can be picked to ripen indoors. This can be assisted to speed up the process by placing an apple or two with the unripened fruit. Often not as nice as tree ripened but at least you get your share.

Bird netting can be employed to prevent birds getting onto the fruit but with trees this can be difficult to use and remove.

There is a **Bird Repeller Ribbon** which is highly reflective tape with holograms imprinted and will work as a deterrent for short periods of time while fruit is ripening.

Similarly you can use CD discs strung like wind chimes, whirling in the breeze to keep the fruit safe.

Another method can be spraying the tree with Nitrosol (Liquid Blood & Bone) which can also act as a deterrent.

It's great to have friends in the garden but not so hot when they upset your world.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)