

When a possum comes to town...

A shadowy figure crossing the roof tops at night, a mysterious scratching at the window...an intruder?...no, its METRO POSSUM!

Possums are sometimes seen in urban areas, running across a street, up a lamppost, in trees or on house roofs. If left unchecked, they will set up a den inside the wall or roof of a house, in a shed, basement, under floorboards, or anywhere that is dry and dark.

A possum in the house...

Possums have sharp claws and a strong tail, enabling them to climb the side of a house and scratch their way through rotting weatherboards.

If you discover a possum inside your house at night, do not chase it as its sharp claws and erratic behaviour could damage furniture. Turn off the lights and open doors and windows to let it out. If you wait until morning you will probably find it asleep in a dark corner or under furniture.

To pick up a live possum, grasp it firmly by the end of its tail, making sure to hold it well away from your body, and swing it gently back and forwards. Make sure the tip of the tail is kept straight so it can't swing up using its tail.

How do you know the culprit is a possum?

Before you start any control programme, make sure you have correctly identified the pest is a possum.

Damage caused by possums browsing is distinctive:

- Possums are untidy eaters and the ground will be littered with half eaten leaves, flowers or fruit.
- The stalk and midrib are left in broadleaf species.
- Small branches may be broken near the top of trees.
- Possums may leave track marks, particularly through grass.
- Claw marks on trees and fence posts may be visible.
- Possum droppings are about 2.5cm long and thicker than a pencil.
- Possums are highly territorial and fights may be heard or fur left behind.

Catching an urban possum

Trapping is the most effective way to catch possums in town. The Timms trap and Live Capture trap are best, although if you opt to use a live capture trap you will need to consider how you will kill the animal.

o Timms trap

The most effective, simple and safe way to catch a possum in an urban environment is to use a Timms trap. They are easy to set and are best baited with fruit like apple, orange or kiwifruit. Sprinkling the fruit with cinnamon will make it more attractive to the possum and less so to birds and cats. Don't use meat or fish as bait as these are likely to remember to keep pets away! attract cats. These traps kill possums quickly using a spring loaded metal mouth so

Timms traps can be purchased from farm supply stores, some hardware stores and can be loaned from Horizons. We charge a small bond which is refunded on return of the trap.

To set the trap:

1. Make sure the trap is unset (step 4). Turn the trap upside down and push the fruit bait onto the bait rod as far as the bend.
2. Place the trap the right way up. Press down on the top of the trap while pulling the nylon cord with your other hand until the striker bar locks into position. When the trap is unset the sensitivity of the trigger action can be adjusted by bending the bait rod where it contacts the cross rod (approximately 50mm from the tip).
3. To remove a possum from the trap, pull the nylon cord to release the pressure on the striker bar and pull the possum free.
Dead possums can be buried in the garden or secured in a plastic bag and put out in your domestic rubbish bag.
Some possums will also be carrying a joey (baby possum) in their pouch. They also need to be destroyed by a firm blow to the head.
4. To unset the trap, trigger the mechanism by smacking the sides of the trap heavily with your open palms.



- **Live capture trap**

These are cages that catch the possum when it reaches for bait attached to a trigger arm, releasing the trip pin and closing the door. The main advantage of these traps is if you catch a pet or non-target animal it can be released unharmed.

Traps should be placed near to the plants that are being attacked. Set the trap by attaching a piece of fruit to the trigger arm, lifting the door and holding it open with the trip pin.

Because the possum is trapped live you will need to dispose of it humanely – remove the possum from the trap by coaxing it towards the back, grabbing its tail and pulling it out. Allow the front paws to maintain contact with the ground to prevent it climbing on you. Deliver a sharp blow between and slightly forward of the ears using a heavy stick or hammer to stun it, then place the animal on a hard rock or stump where another hard blow to the same area will kill it. If you are unable to kill it yourself, your local vet may be able to dispose of it for you at your cost.

Live capture traps can be purchased from farm supply stores.

Contact us on free phone 0508 800 800 if you would like help or advice with possums on your property. We can provide free advice and information and if needed, user-pays assistance.