

Preventing and Controlling Woodpecker Damage

Woodpeckers are small birds (7–15 inches in length) and usually have brightly contrasting colors (often black, white, and red). They have short legs with two sharp-clawed, backward-pointed toes and stiff tail feathers for support. With these physical characteristics, they are able to cling easily to the trunks and branches of trees, utility poles, or wood siding. These birds also have strong pointed beaks for pecking into wood and a long tongue to retrieve insects from burrows in wood or bark. Woodpeckers nest in cavities in trees, fence posts, utility poles, and even buildings. These attractive birds are enjoyed by birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts but can sometimes cause problems for homeowners.

Several approaches can be used to prevent damage by woodpeckers. Tolerance of some nuisance activity may be the easiest course of action if the damage or nuisance level is minor. However, you must ultimately decide what level you are willing to accept. If you choose to manage your woodpecker problems, remember there seldom are quick solutions. The key to success is persistence.

Damage Prevention and Control

Exclusion

One of the most effective methods for excluding woodpeckers from damaging wood siding beneath the eaves is to place lightweight plastic bird-type netting ($\frac{3}{4}$ -inch mesh) over the area, leaving at least 3 inches of space between the building and the netting. Netting can be attached to overhanging eaves and angled back to the siding below the damaged area. Metal sheathing (especially aluminum flashing) or plastic sheeting can also be placed over the pecked areas on buildings. $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch hardware cloth can also be used to cover pecked areas and prevent future damage. All of these barriers can be disguised with paint or simulated wood grain to match the siding.

Scare Tactics

Toy plastic twirlers, aluminum foil, colored plastic strips, reflective mylar tape, pie pans, and bright tin lids have been used with some success to frighten woodpeckers. The key is these devices use movement and/or reflection to scare birds. Stationary model hawks, owls, snakes, and cats are generally ineffective. Loud noises (hand-clapping, toy cap pistol, banging a garbage can lid) can frighten woodpeckers from houses. Propane exploders (gas cannons) are sometimes good for large orchards, where the birds sometimes damage fruits. High-frequency sounds are not effective for birds. Frightening devices are best used as soon as the problem is identified. Once a bird has established a territory, it can be difficult to drive it away.

Repellents and Toxicants

No taste or odor repellents are effective with woodpeckers. However, sticky or tacky bird repellents (e.g., Tanglefoot, 4-The-Birds, and Roost-No-More) smeared in areas with damage can discourage birds from using an area. One caveat, some of the repellents can discolor wood, stain, or paint. Instead of applying directly to the house, you may apply the repellent to a thin piece of pressed board or plastic. No toxicants are registered for use.

Trapping / Shooting

Woodpeckers are federally protected species, and permits are required for any trapping, handling, or shooting.

Insecticides for Indirect Control

This is based on the premise that woodpeckers are looking for insects living in the wood siding. Although this has some merit with insect-infested wood, woodpeckers often attack siding, poles, and posts that are without insects. Some insecticides also may harm the birds.

Source: OSU Ext., Amanda D. Rodewald