

Gators in the City

Living in a neighborhood in Florida means learning to live with coyotes, raccoons, opossums, armadillos and alligators. That's right, alligators! In Florida, there are up to two million alligators and over 17 million people. In the wild, alligators live in freshwater, and feed on fish, frogs, birds, turtles, snakes, small mammals, white-tailed deer and wild hogs. They can grow up to 14 feet long and weigh up to 800 pounds. It is assumed that all bodies of fresh water - rivers, lakes and ponds throughout Florida, whether in the middle of downtown or in suburbia, are inhabited by alligators. This includes man-made canals, urban ponds such as those found in golf courses, parks, even neighborhood swimming pools. Alligators are also found under people's cars, occasionally in their houses.

So, why are alligators in Florida neighborhoods? It is natural for alligators to relocate to different bodies of fresh water, especially during mating season. Not only do urban fresh bodies of water provide water and shelter for alligators, but they also provide a food source. Pets often become prey for alligators. A swimming dog looks like an alligator's natural prey. The good news is, with a few exceptions, most alligators try to avoid human interactions. Alligators usually only become dangerous once humans start to feed them, as they then look to people for their food source and lose their fear of us. To keep alligators from becoming a nuisance, humans should never feed them, and small children and dogs should be kept away from areas where alligators inhabit.



An alligator enjoying a swim in a neighborhood swimming pool.



A Palm Beach resident watches a resident urban alligator.

Playing Possum

The opossum is the only marsupial found in North America. In the wild, they are found in woodlands and riparian areas. Opossums weigh up to 15 pounds and are nocturnal omnivores that eat insects, earthworms, small rodents, snakes, snails, birds, frogs and berries.

Opossums live in urban areas because it is easy to find food and shelter. They will feed on dog food, garbage, fruit on trees and bird seed. They find shelter in attics, garages, chimneys and under houses. When opossums get into homes, they can damage buildings by pushing in vents or window screens, scattering insulation and chewing electrical wiring. They may injure pets or expose them to disease. They also urinate in areas that they inhabit causing an odor. Because opossums are nocturnal, many people have a problem with them but don't know it because they never see them. In New York, opossums were introduced to urban areas to feed on rats that were a nuisance. Now instead, the opossums are a nuisance.

To keep opossums away from your home, secure all garbage cans, feed pets inside your home and remove all excess food between feedings. Secure all openings to your house, especially on the roof.

