



The Official Website for

## East Surrey Badger Protection Society

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# Badgers & Gardens



The following advice is based on the Badger Trust's publication '**Badgers in your Garden**'.

The guidelines have been produced to help people who have a problem with badgers in their gardens. Many people are delighted and welcome badgers when they choose to visit. Occasionally, though, they damage gardens, particularly lawns and plants, to the disappointment and annoyance of the gardener. Badgers are strong animals and can damage fences and other boundaries in their determination to enter gardens.

Badgers and their homes (setts) are protected by law, but lawful actions can usually be taken to resolve, or at least minimise problems, without harm to badgers or other animals.

These guidelines contain general practical advice and information. Readers are advised to seek further local advice before taking any action which, although considered innocent, may inadvertently result in badgers or their setts being illegally harmed or disturbed.

Your local badger conservation group may be able to help. (**See Contact Us**)

## Why do badgers visit my garden?

Badgers are creatures of habit, living in a social group (or family) which occupies a territory. This territory may include your garden, and depending on where you live, could include many neighbouring gardens and other sites, or surrounding fields and woods if you live in the country. The size of badger territories can vary considerably, with each one providing for all the needs of its resident badgers.

Quite often when new properties are built badgers are disturbed and may lose feeding grounds. This can result in badgers entering established gardens nearby which have not been troubled before. Also as new gardens are established badgers visit them as they form part of their original territory. Almost invariably badgers will enter gardens in search of food.

Badgers are normally nocturnal so garden visits are generally unseen during the night, unless the badgers' sett is nearby when the animals may visit early in the evening. Badgers tend to follow the same routes when moving around their territory, so the entry point into your garden should be easy to find.

Occasionally an injured or sick badger may seek refuge in a garden and hide in an outbuilding or under a shed.

Sometimes it can be seen during the day. If this happens or badgers start to excavate a sett in your garden, contact your local badger group or Badger Trust for advice.

Food placed for other animals and birds, particularly peanuts, will attract badgers. To avoid this, food should only be placed in the garden during daylight and not left out overnight.

## What will badgers eat in my garden?

Badgers are omnivorous and will eat many things. Most of the time badgers search for earthworms and insect larvae, which are often easy to find in lawns with short grass. They will also eat flower bulbs, fruits and vegetables, with some items being favoured more than others. Seasonal availability of food will result in badger activity fluctuating with the time of year.

The most obvious signs of badgers feeding are when they scrape out small pits in lawns to dig out insect larvae like cockchafer, cutworm and leatherjackets. Squirrels, woodpeckers, rooks and crows make similar holes. When badgers take earthworms there is often little trace as the badgers suck them up off the surface.

On occasion badgers will take other wild animals if available, such as rabbits, moles, rats, mice and hedgehogs. They will also take food put out for other animals, and occasionally raid dustbins.

## Will putting out food for badgers help?

In dry or frosty weather badgers are unable to get at their preferred earthworm and insect larvae food. Putting out food and water at these times specifically for the badgers may distract them from eating other food available, such as your fruit and vegetables. However, food placement may encourage the badgers to visit more frequently, which could be counterproductive if they are causing problems. Also it may artificially support a larger population of badgers than that which would occur naturally.

If you wish to feed badgers in your garden, they will readily eat peanuts, raisins, most soft fruits and bread (which can be soaked in water or spread with peanut butter). A specially formulated badger food is also available commercially from CJ WildBird Foods.

Sweet foods such as cakes, honey, jam and syrup are loved by badgers but can cause tooth decay and so should be given only as an occasional treat and then in very small quantities. Milk or meat scraps should not be fed to badgers.

## What else might badgers do in my garden?

Badgers could excavate a sett. Badgers are large animals up to a metre long and often weighing more than 12 kilograms. A badger sett would therefore be quite obvious by the amount of spoil removed during excavation, and by the size of the tunnels (250mm diameter).

Occasionally badgers may dig a latrine in your garden. A latrine is usually a small excavation flower pot sized - about 150mm deep and about as wide, in which the badgers deposit their dung.

If your garden has an overgrown area with dense cover then badgers may make a nest in there. The collection of bedding material (grass, leaves or other plant material) will leave an obvious trail as the badgers drag it backwards into the cover. These nests will be used periodically when the badgers are moving around their territory.

## How can I deter badgers from my garden?

It is recommended that you always seek advice before taking any action. The ESBPS have a lot of experience in dealing with problems caused by badgers. (**See Contact Us**)

The legislation in place to protect badgers and their setts from persecution needs to be clearly understood to avoid well intentioned but illegal action. You could for example block up the place where badgers get into your garden, but if this prevented a badger from getting to or from its sett, it could be an offence.

### Generally there are several actions which could be considered:

#### Physical barriers

It is possible to construct a fence that will deter badger entry. Badgers are strong and persistent animals that can easily break through or dig under a weak or poorly constructed fence. They can climb well, and will squeeze through quite small gaps.

A strong wooden fence with heavy wire mesh attached and extended below ground, or a heavy wire mesh fence with the bottom extended below ground is recommended. Chicken wire is inadequate. The extension below ground will need to extend at least 600mm depending on the soil structure and have a horizontal return away from the garden of at least 300mm. The fence will need to be at least 1200mm high, and with wire mesh fencing an overhang of at least 300mm is recommended directed away from the garden.

An alternative barrier is a stone, brick or block wall with a suitable foundation dependant on soil structure. Such a wall should be at least 1200mm high with a smooth surface finish to deter climbing.

Electric fencing, energised either by battery or transformed mains electric supply, can be an effective deterrent. It can also be installed either temporarily or permanently, and can be used to protect the whole or a specific part of a garden. Mains electric supply fencing can also be controlled with a time clock which will automatically switch the current on in the evening and off in the morning. Permanent mains supply electric fencing using unobtrusive materials can provide a cost effective and lasting deterrent.

Electric fencing needs to be firmly installed with at least two taut wires. These wires should be placed at heights of 75mm and 200mm above the ground. A third wire positioned at 300mm above the ground could also be installed. The wires should be adequately supported (minimum interval 3 metres), follow the ground contours and be well earthed. Vegetation should be kept cut back to avoid the wires shorting to earth during operation.

There are important safety precautions which must be taken when using electric fencing. Please consult the manufacturer's instructions for further information on these. A leaflet produced by Natural England entitled "Badger problems: use of electric fencing to prevent agricultural damage" (TIN 027) includes guidance on safety. The leaflet is available from Natural England's Wildlife Administration Unit, telephone 0845 6014523, or download a copy from their website using the page: [www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/wildlife/advice/advisoryleaflets.aspx](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/wildlife/advice/advisoryleaflets.aspx)

#### Chemical deterrents

There are currently no chemical deterrents that are specifically approved to deter badgers. Renardine is no longer approved and it is an offence to advertise, sell, store or use it. You can get advice on its disposal from your local waste disposal authority.

There are products for the home garden market that do not carry any legal restrictions as to the animals against which they may be used. They carry general recommendations in the 'Directions for Use' such as 'effective against a wide range of animals and birds'. We do not know if they effectively deter badgers. You can search for them using their active ingredient, aluminium ammonium sulphate, on the Health and Safety Executive's pesticides website:

<https://secure.pesticides.gov.uk/garden/prodsearch.asp>

It is illegal to use substances like creosote, diesel oil, mothballs or bleach to deter badgers. These substances can be dangerous to children, domestic pets and other wild animals. There are claims that male human urine, human hair clippings and lion dung spread on the garden may act as a deterrent, but these methods have not been fully researched.

#### Ultrasonic devices

These devices emit a fixed or variable signal which is inaudible to humans. There are reports that some have proved effective as badger deterrents in certain circumstances, but currently we know of none which is specifically recommended for use with badgers. Should you wish to experiment with such a device then it is recommended that you discuss the application with the device manufacturer or stockist, paying particular attention to the effect it may have on domestic pets.

## Lawn damage:

Badgers digging for insect larvae in lawns can cause significant damage. Some lawns are more likely to support a significant insect larvae burden than others, and this is often determined by the condition of the lawn. There are a number of actions which can be taken to reduce this type of problem.

### Improving lawn condition

Well drained and well aerated lawns are less attractive to insects as an egg laying site. Mechanical aeration or spiking the lawn followed by the application of lawn sand will improve aeration. In extreme cases drainage improvements may require the installation of drainage pipes. Reduce damp areas by removing moss and overhanging vegetation. Moss can be removed by chemical treatment followed by thorough raking, or by firm raking by hand or mechanical rake. Regular mowing in season and periodic raking will also reduce the likelihood of insect egg laying. Reducing the insect larvae burden will not only reduce the likelihood of damage by badgers, it will also mean less damage to your lawn by the insect larvae themselves.

### Chemical removal of insect larvae

The use of pesticides in Great Britain is governed by the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 (as amended). Under these regulations, all pesticides must be approved before they can be sold or used, and must be used in accordance with the terms of their approval. Many pesticides previously approved for use against insects in garden lawns are no longer available as safety concerns have led to their approval being removed. We are aware of one pesticide currently approved for use by the public to remove insect larvae in lawns. You can contact a lawn care company for advice. There are a number of alternatives to the use of pesticides.

### Biological control of insect larvae

Some garden centres and mail order garden catalogues supply biological control packs which contain a natural predator, parasite or fungus which will naturally remove harmful insect larvae. These controls include nematodes that can be useful in removing leatherjackets. These creatures are packed in powder form which when mixed with water can be applied as a seasonal drench to your lawn. This system of control is selective, harmless to other animals, and is totally natural.

### Organic removal of insect larvae

This is by far the cheapest method of reducing insect burden and is effective for small problem areas. It simply entails spraying the area with water, then covering it with black polythene sheets which are firmly held down and left overnight. The next morning many of the insect larvae will have migrated to the surface where they can be removed.

## Are badgers a threat to me or my pets?

Badgers are afraid of humans as we are their only real predator. Normally a badger will disappear at the approach of a human and so will not present a threat. However should you approach an injured or trapped badger it may attempt to attack in defence or in an attempt to gain freedom. In these circumstances **DO NOT TOUCH IT (See Badgers in Trouble)**.

There are many reports of badgers and domestic pets interacting without problems. Generally badgers avoid dogs unless they are harassed or cornered by them. It is best to keep your dog in overnight if it is likely to attack a badger. This will reduce the chance of it encountering a badger and getting into a fight that could harm either or both animals. Guinea pigs, rabbits and poultry should be housed securely at night. Attacks by badgers are very rare, but raids by foxes are not unusual.

There are claims that badgers carry disease and will infect humans. This is only remotely possible if you were to be bitten by an infectious badger, or if for some reason you ingested faeces from such a badger. Anyone who accidentally touches badger dung or urine should, of course, wash his or her hands thoroughly. **(See Badgers and TB)**.

## What are the benefits of badgers in my garden?

Badgers have been voted the best liked British mammal. Watching them in your garden foraging for food, perhaps causing acceptable disruption, can give great pleasure and be educational for younger members of the family. The badgers will also remove some harmful creatures which may damage your crops, fruits or flowers. Badgers were with us long before becoming famous in 'Wind in the Willows'. With consideration we should be able to live in harmony.