



DO YOU KNOW...



...about Groundhogs???

Groundhogs (*Marmota monax*), also called woodchucks, are the second largest native rodent in Maryland, behind the beaver. Weighing anywhere from 2.2 to 5 kgs (5-10 lbs), these light to dark brown furry beasts have made themselves a home in many peoples' yards. Traditionally associated with open fields and croplands, suburbanization has benefited the groundhog, giving them safe haven from predators and plenty of garden fruits and vegetables. This herbivore, whose natural diet includes grass, clover, dandelion, new shoots and buds has added apples, sweet potatoes, kale, romaine, and carrots to its diet, thanks to farming.

month's gestation. The young grow and mature rapidly; most are weaned and on their own at two months of age, usually by midsummer.

Groundhogs are excellent diggers, with intricate burrows weaving to and from their main chamber. A typical groundhog burrow will have one main entrance (most noticeable by the large fan of patted dirt at the opening) and up to three secondary entrances used to trick predators. The tunnels are usually shallow, around two to three feet deep, but the main chamber can be up to five feet deep. Burrow systems in prime territories could be inhabited for decades by generations of groundhogs or even other species. Although mostly solitary, a couple of groundhogs could share a large enough burrow without much fuss.



the year. typical hibernation can span five to six months, usually from October to February.

Groundhogs are one of this area's true hibernators, sleeping through coldest months of A

Groundhogs spend most of the summer and all fall eating as much as they can to build up a nice layer of fat to sustain them through hibernation. Once the first major ground freeze of the winter has passed, most groundhogs are already deep asleep. After about five months, the groundhog awakes and pokes his head above his burrow to take in the scenery. If the winter has been warm and new growth is evident, the groundhog may take inventory of its territory, sampling the new food and getting a good look at what has changed over the winter. If the winter has been cold and snowy, the groundhog will most likely return to its burrow and sleep away another couple of weeks before checking again.

Groundhogs are not considered a significant source of any infectious disease, such as rabies, which could affect people. Although they can get rabies like any other warm-blooded animal, their fast rodent metabolism speeds the disease's progress towards the brain and the animal usually dies soon after being infected.

Although groundhogs and people can coexist peacefully, some do not like to share their yard and garden, or fear for the safety of their foundation. Groundhogs are extremely cautious animals so increased activity in your yard or garden could be enough to cause them to move to a new

territory. Where they have burrowed under buildings, exclusion is the recommended action to take. Placing simple one-way doors (such as Hav-A-Heart traps) in the openings of their burrows will let them out but not back in. The trapped groundhog can then be relocated to a more suitable territory. Rags soaked in ammonia can also be placed in each burrow entrance as its strong smell will deter not only the groundhog, but also other mammals that could be interested in the burrow. Close watch of all entrances is necessary before determining if the groundhog has vacated. Erecting fences around your yard will not keep these creatures out, as groundhogs are excellent climbers. Once the burrow is vacated, the entrances can be sealed or filled in. However, exclusion should only take place at the end of summer to ensure that any young have left the burrow and are not trapped inside when the entrances are sealed off.

Groundhog breeding season takes place in March through April, with a typical litter size of two to six pups born after a



NOW YOU KNOW !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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