**Tips for Managing Nuisance Armadillo**

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Armadillos are common across Oklahoma and frequently cause turf damage to home lawns.

**The Culprit**

The nine-banded armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*) is one of about 20 species of armadillo in the Americas, and is the only armadillo that occurs in the U.S. The word ‘armadillo’ is Spanish for ‘little armored one’, which is an apt description as they are covered with thick protective scales, and has earned the nickname of ‘possum on the half-shell’. Armadillos are mammals and have sparse hair mostly on their underside. The nine-banded armadillo typically has a single fertilized egg that splits into four, so it gives birth to four identical young. Another unique characteristic is that, while armadillo can swim, they sometimes walk under water when crossing shallow ditches. The armadillo expanded its distribution north in recent decades; however, it is sometimes reduced in numbers in northern Oklahoma following prolonged cold winters as it is not cold adapted. Armadillos do not hibernate, but they become less active during cold weather. During the winter, they are more prone to feed during the day when temperatures are warm. Armadillos feed on invertebrates such as insects and earthworms by digging in loose soil using their excellent sense of smell and long claws. They also dig up shallowly rooted annuals incidental to their foraging for invertebrates. Armadillo digging becomes a nuisance when it happens in the home landscape.

Damage from armadillo is generally most pronounced in the summer months as lawns are irrigated. This makes the soil easier to dig in and brings invertebrates closer to the surface. Armadillo damage is easy to identify as it is noted by multiple shallow holes (usually up to 6 inches). They will often root similar to pigs, especially in loose mulch. Skunk and squirrel damage can look similar, although it is usually smaller in diameter (less than 4 inches) and shallower (less than 3 inches) than armadillo damage. The armadillo generally digs burrows in forested areas. These burrows are used to rest and avoid predators.

**The Fix**

One issue that gardeners should consider before trying to control armadillo damage is to examine their personal tolerance level. What may be considered a minor inconvenience to one gardener may be completely unacceptable to the next. This is not a trivial matter, as it determines when and where management is applied. Homeowners should be aware that there is seldom a quick and easy fix to any wildlife damage problem. Often the cost (time and money) of control exceeds the damage caused, and in this particular case, damage is mostly aesthetics or nuisance. Whether the nuisance warrants control is related to the tolerance and preference of the homeowner, so consider this before starting any control measures.

If the damage is tolerable, you may still want to fix the damage. Damage to rhizomatous grasses such as Bermuda grass is typically manageable as healthy grass can quickly fill in bare patches. Cool season grasses, such as fescue, are more problematic because the bare patches will need to be reseeded in the fall. Additionally, the extra irrigation required by cool season grasses in the Oklahoma summer make them especially attractive to armadillos. Regardless, you may want to fill in the digging with soil and turf. Digging in flower beds...
Armadillos are generally easy to capture in a live-catch trap. While no bait is needed, the use of existing barriers and/or temporary barriers will greatly enhance capture. The idea is to create a funnel for the armadillo. This trap set has used existing barriers such as a tree to help funnel the armadillo. Notice the poultry wire held in place with rebar. Fresh soil covering the bottom of the trap would also be a good idea.

Now What

Once trapped, it is not legal to move the armadillo to another location and release it unless you have landowner permission. However, transporting animals presents many problems such as disease transmission, displacement of existing wildlife and stress on the animal moved. Therefore, it is recommended that any trapped armadillo either should be humanely killed or else contact a professional nuisance wildlife control operator (https://www.wildlifedepartment.com/law/nwco-operators) to have them remove the animal. There will be a fee associated with this service. If you do decide to kill the armadillo, do it as humanely as possible. A shot to head or spine with a 22-caliber rimfire rifle is sufficient and is more discrete than other firearms. Drowning is not humane! Before shooting, make certain that there are no rocks or other hard objects under the armadillo—prevent a ricochet. Also wear eye protection to prevent debris from injuring your eyes. To reduce the potential of leprosy transmission, use gloves when handling the armadillo or the trap.

While armadillos can be caught fairly easily, after a few episodes of trapping and disposal of the animal you may decide the damage is tolerable. If so, consider cutting back on irrigation to lessen the likelihood of future damage.