



RATTLESNAKES

A NATURAL PART OF DESERT LIFE

There are many sources of information about the rattlesnakes of Arizona since, like many things we don't understand; we are both curious and repelled by them. On this web page we will provide a few key points and provide reference links at the end.

Rattlesnakes come in many varieties, prefer certain altitude ranges, based on species, and use a combination of hot surfaces and cold to help regulate their body temperature. They feed on rodents, lizards and birds. They do not need water, getting their moisture from their prey, but they are not averse to water and can swim if necessary. They are deaf (they can't hear you scream) but very sensitive to vibration through ground.

A mature rattler will rattle first to deter a threat and strike only if necessary. Many snake bites are "dry" meaning no venom is injected. The snake will use venom only when it thinks it is necessary. This does not mean just when it is being attacked. It means when it thinks it is being attacked. You may be walking down a fairway in the evening and be a perceived threat to a snake in the grass. The newborn rattlers, while not yet packing a full wallop of venom, have also not yet learned to control the venom when they strike and are likely to use what they have.

The cost of anti-venom treatment for a snake bite to a person is in the range of \$100,000 to \$125,000. Dogs can also be a victim. There is a new rattlesnake vaccine for dogs.

We can coexist with the snakes. We just need a little understanding of their behavior and a reasonable amount of caution.

Diamondback rattlesnake:

This is the rattler you are most likely to see in our neighborhood. It hibernates in the winter, somewhere around November to March, but the time may vary based on temperature. They mate in early spring and the female gives birth to 8-10 live young in summer. She immediately abandons them to survive on their own.

Rattlers like the easy life of a pack rat nest because it is a ready-made home. They might move into an abandoned nest or one still occupied. If occupied, the rats will quickly leave because they are a key source of food for the snakes. The snakes also are happy under a bush, sheltered from the sun.

So remember, if you see a piece of trash under a bush, don't just reach in to pick it up, take a second look first or use a long handled tool to reach the item.

When the nights grow cool in the fall, the rattlers like to absorb the heat from hot blacktop. The photo at the top of this article was taken at Reyecuelo and Garzota just after sundown.

Mojave rattlesnake:

This is probably the **most dangerous snake in North America**. It is aggressive, fairly large-bodied, and has complex venom composed of hemolytic and neurotoxic elements. It is ten times more poisonous than other rattlers. It is responsible for several deaths each year, including in recent years a prominent snake toxin expert. This snake should be avoided. The ratio of Mojaves to Diamondbacks in our area is about 1:15.

They like to live in abandoned pack rat burrows or near their favorite vegetation, which includes the **creosote bush and the mesquite tree**. It is thought they are attracted by the odor.

IN GENERAL

Help protect yourself and your neighbors from rattlesnakes:

- **Keep cover away from walking areas.**
 - Trim shrubs to at least eight inches back from sidewalks. Remove bottom branches from shrubs.
- **Eliminate rodent burrows.**
- **Don't let shrubs or vines grow to the top of your backyard walls.**
- ***Be observant* and report rattlesnakes you find so they can be removed. **Emergency number for snake removal is 520-629-9200.****

Your back yard:

Add a low level rattlesnake proof fence around the backyard. Most Green Valley homes already have this, but it may not be as secure as we think. Just make sure these specifications have been followed in order for the fence to be effective:

- Use mesh that is not wider than a quarter of an inch in diameter or use solid material. Any untextured material is best because snakes cannot climb smooth surfaces as they cannot get a grip.

- Make the fence a minimum height of three feet.
- Take care with corners, so as not to create a "bellyhold" (snake for "toehold") on the fence.
- Bury the fence to a minimum of 12 inches under the ground.
- Be careful with any gates. If you don't join the fence to the walls of your house, it is important to ensure that any gate has no gaps on the sides and sits flush with the ground. It can help to place a concrete slab directly under the gate going into the ground as a deterrent - this must sit flush with the base of the gate. This is a time when precision building is very important.
- Maintain the fence - **all gaps, holes and dirt collapses must be dealt with quickly** to prevent possible entry-points from weakening the fence. Be sure that drainage holes in walls are covered with metal mesh or slotted plastic covers.

Remove shrubs, overhanging vegetation and any other plants from the perimeter of the fence. Do not lean anything against the fence that a rattlesnake might be able to use as leverage to crawl over. ***Remember that shrubs or vines along a wall could provide a means for snakes to climb into your yard or your neighbor's!***

Keep the rodents under control. Don't provide a tasty food source. Get rid of mice, rats and other rodents feasting about your home and you will remove a major source of rattlesnake attractant. (Poison is not considered the best choice for rodent control as it can be moved to other locations by the rodents and can enter the food chain.)

Keep other food sources out of the reach of snakes. This means keeping pet food inside or covered. Garbage cans should be securely covered at all times.

Eliminate rattlesnake homes and nesting-sites. Potential homes for rattlesnakes should be removed from the area around your home and **not** placed in common areas. This includes such things as wood piles, rock piles, brush piles, building materials, animal burrows, etc. Think about the places that would be cozy for a snake to move into and remove them. But be careful when you remove them! There may already be a rattlesnake in residence.

MORE INFORMATION:

http://www.azgfd.gov/w_c/arizona-rattlesnakes.shtml

http://www.desertmuseum.org/books/nhsd_rattlesnakes3.php

<http://wc.pima.edu/Bfiero/tucsonecology/animals/venom.htm>