

GROWERTALKS

Pest Management

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Unwelcome Guests

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Earlier this spring, editor Chris Beytes shared some stories in his *Acres Online* e-newsletter about strange pests spotted in greenhouses. He told readers about wild pigs in Texas and an infestation of rabbits in Florida. We decided it would be fun to dig into this a bit more and asked folks on social media to let us know what they've encountered. We had no idea it would be such a popular topic! (Maybe with all of the doom and gloom of 2020, you guys needed a break and telling crazy greenhouse pest stories was therapeutic.) From more than 125 responses, here are some of the highlights.



(Editor's note: One pest that kept showing up was racoon. Apparently, they love chewing their way through poly and sleeping between the layers. Not only does it make for a funny tale, it also leads to very cool photos! Imagine looking up and seeing the outlines of animal bodies suspended in midair.)

Kangaroos bouncing indiscriminately through our container nursery, tipping over pots.—Australia

We've had an alligator walk through a house and into the break area!—Florida

I had a Canadian goose that couldn't fly who followed me to the greenhouse every day. As long as I was onsite, he was good, but when I went out for deliveries, he attacked everyone—Virginia

Black bears were going after the fruit on trees in the nursery. They definitely scared a few workers.—British Columbia

We had a deer run through a glass house—literally through the glass. Not once, but twice. He managed to trample plenty of plants during his route. It was a small range, but a lot of damage.—Ohio

At the nursery, we had gators everywhere! We had them on the soil lines, and everyone would run and scream. One day, we were tying vines and an alligator came between the rows and we went running to get on trailers to avoid getting bitten.—South Carolina

We currently have a crocodile in our water basin.—Brazil

My damn emus poke their head through and take bites from the cactus from time to time.—California

What haven't we had? I've seen ferrets, peacock, baby black bear, floppy-eared bunny, racoons, muskrat, groundhogs, deer, squirrels, all sorts of birds and, of course, insects.—Ohio

When I was a kid, there was a nursing home next to our business and they had a pet monkey. Sometimes the monkey would get loose and end up hanging out in our greenhouses. We weren't allowed to work until the monkey left.—Massachusetts

We had a young moose poke his horns into the poly of three greenhouses.—Alberta



Dad's cattle reach over and pull potted banana plants over the fence to eat them.—Indiana

We have problems with turkeys.—Michigan

Alligators and snapping turtles aren't uncommon here.—Florida

We had a chipmunk that would come in every night, and dig up and eat seeds that were planted. He loved squash and cucumbers and ate more than 1,000 zucchini seeds. We named him Chip.—New York

We had an opossum in a garbage can.—Wisconsin

Not actually a pest; probably a method of pest control: We have a bobcat in our greenhouse from time to time.—Missouri

Rats are always eating the drip tape in our organic house.—Colorado

Over here, we deal with a lot of toads and lizards.—Texas

We've had trouble with badgers.—Colorado

The neighbor's cattle got loose in the tree farm. We just called it our new organic fertilizer program.—Florida

Here are a few weird pests: I found a racing pigeon (located the owner from the leg band), a goat, a raccoon fishing in our display pond, frogs, bullfrogs, toads, a hawk, assorted small birds, butterflies and hummingbirds sipping a little nectar, and rabbits (including a nest of babies). We caught a bullfrog swallowing a toad on video once. And a coyote was seen in the mum field (maybe after those rabbits). Can you tell we're in the country?—Maryland

We had a cow in the greenhouse once. It walked right up to a grower and mooed at her.—Louisiana

One time, groundhogs ate a few hundred mums. When customers asked why some of the finished plants were small or misshapen, I had to explain the "all-you-can-eat buffet."—Ohio

Mice mowed down 10 flats of marigolds in one night.—Maine

A peacock and turkeys eat our rhubarb and hosta starts.—Indiana

Nutria were destroying maples here on the farm.—Oregon

Rabbits frequently chew the drip lines to get to the water. And we've had deer, groundhogs, ants destroying gerbera pots, and birds getting in the greenhouse to eat seed out of plug trays.—New York

Snapping turtles—seems we are a breeding ground for many types of turtles, but it's a special thrill when the dog goes nuts and a snapper is hissing.—Pennsylvania

We have pukeko (swamphen), which pull rootstocks out of our field nursery for fun and nibble buds out of freshly budded apple trees.—New Zealand

We had a Cooper's Hawk get trapped in our greenhouse once. Obviously not a pest, we loved him, but he did destroy some plants before escaping and flying happily away. - California

That's just a snapshot of some of the most interesting responses. From tales of bears and gators to mice and rats, it seems greenhouses attract some very interesting visitors. We hope you can relate to some of these or maybe you're just happy the pests you encounter are more traditional.

Before we wrap this up, we did hear from a number of readers that humans can sometimes be the biggest pests. You probably agree. After dealing with kids switching tags on young plants, employees being too heavy with the watering hose and customers stealing cuttings, maybe you'd welcome a family of racoons between the poly. **GT**