Snakes are drawn to homesites to seek:

1. **Food (primarily rodents)**
2. **Shelter (hiding and resting places for snakes and their prey)**
3. **Hibernating sites (foundations, cisterns, dug wells)**

The primary way to minimize having snakes around the home is to eliminate these three necessities, and the primary way to manage your property to encourage snakes is to provide and maximize these.

**Food**

Rodents are the primary food sources that attract snakes into yards. Rodents are attracted by food and shelter. Bird feeders close to the house supply a ready seed source for mice, chipmunks, and ground squirrels, especially if they are kept stocked during the warmer months. Moving bird feeders away from buildings and not feeding during the late spring and summer (when birds have plenty of natural foods available) can deter rodents from yards.

For snakes that feed on frogs, like garter snakes, yard ponds may attract snakes because frogs use the ponds to feed and breed.

Generally speaking, if you provide a ready food supply, wildlife has a way of finding it.

**Shelter**

All wildlife require shelter from the elements. Most rural landowners are well aware of mice in and around their homes, particularly in the winter. Rodents are attracted to the home for shelter and available food in and around it. Rodents not only supply food for snakes, but they may create, by chewing, access points for snakes into homes. Snakes may initially be attracted to your yard and home by the scent of rodents. A key to keeping snakes away is to eliminate rodents in house and yard. This is not easy task! It requires that yard landscaping be simplified to eliminate shelter in close proximity to building foundations: removing dense bushes and flower gardens (keeping them out in the open lawn as opposed to up against the house), keeping firewood well away from buildings or indoors, and keeping clutter to an absolute minimum. Rock retaining walls and rock structure used in landscaping offer ready homes for rodents and snakes. Snap trapping and the filling of rodent burrows may also reduce rodent numbers. In addition, mowing must be kept up, and junk piles eliminated or at least moved a good distance from your buildings. Keeping garage doors closed tightly and/or clutter free, particularly on the garage floor, can also reduce rodent numbers significantly.

On the other hand, if you wish to encourage snakes on your property, you would want to encourage rodents, and provide shelter for both them and snakes. You might want to set aside an area of your property specifically managed for snakes and rodents, with a lot of structure (no need to mow!!) and with a multitude of shelter objects such as downed logs, rock walls, and brush piles. When choosing this area, be sure that you are not placing your house in the path of snake migration from an overwintering area to a summer foraging area.

**Hibernation**

Snakes are drawn to homes as hibernating sites when there is access to a basement, crawl space or cistern, through cracks in rock foundations. Hibernating sites are likely found by snakes when seeking food or shelter. Maintaining the mortar in old foundations will usually eliminate the “hibernacula.” In some cases, rodent-chewed holes or rotting outer floor joists will allow entry between the house ring and the foundation which creates an opening for snakes. Patching these holes will eliminate entry. Periodic inspections of the foundation and house ring can help prevent problems in the future. We advise not doing mortar patching until after mid-May, which allows time for the snakes to naturally disperse from their hibernating site after emerging in spring. If you close up the openings earlier in the year, you risk trapping the snakes in your home.
General Deterrents

Walls can be erected to discourage snakes from enclosed areas, provided they are high enough and maintained to prevent entry through gates or by passing under the structure. Snake walls should be solid, four feet high and have a four-inch lip at the top that projects away from the area you are trying to protect.

Gates must be fitted tightly, sitting tightly against the side walls and the ground (no more than 1/8” clearance). Please keep in mind that there is no 100% snake proof fence. However, this design will keep most snakes out of the area.

Several products that claim to be snake repellents are on the market. Though fashionably marketed and high-priced, there is currently NO SNAKE REPELLENT known to be effective. Be skeptical.

About Snakes

Michigan is home to 18 kinds of snakes. Only one is venomous, the eastern massasauga rattlesnake, also known as the swamp rattler. Michigan is the last stronghold for this species, an important piece of our natural heritage.

How to distinguish the massasauga from Michigan’s non-venomous snakes

- the massasauga’s tail does not come to a point like other Michigan snakes, but instead terminates with one or more rattle segments
- the massasauga has vertical eye pupils rather than round as in Michigan’s other snakes
- the massasauga has a set of heat pits located between its nostril and eye on each side of its face. No other Michigan snake has pits.

Snakes, like all other wildlife, are extremely valuable in nature as predator and prey, consuming rodents, amphibians and insects, and providing food for a variety of birds and mammals.

Fear of snakes has often led to snake deaths. By following the guidance in this brochure, you and snakes can co-exist. You can be a powerful force in helping conserve this important part of Michigan’s natural heritage.

Living With Snakes

A guide to help you manage snakes around your property

This brochure is designed to provide landowners and tenants with guidance to help manage snakes around their properties. There are practical steps that can be taken to discourage or encourage snakes on your property, depending on what you desire.

Thanks to Bob Hay for permission to modify WI DNR PUB-ER-084 98 for use in MI.