Trapping possums at home
FAQs

Are there possums in urban New Plymouth? I thought they only lived in the country

Yes! You may be surprised by just how many possums there are. While they prefer to live in areas of bush possums can also be found in backyards throughout the city - anywhere they have a food supply (they're big fans of citrus and roses!) and shelter (anything from woodpiles to garden sheds).

Limited monitoring has found possums all over the city from Bell Block through to Whalers Gate. For example, 90% of the wax tags along the Coastal Walkway near Te Rewa Rewa Bridge and Lake Rotomanu had possum bites. A monitoring line in Westown had a 50% result. And we've had reports of them spotted in Spotswood, Westown, Lynmouth and Highlands Park.

Why are possums a problem?

Possums were introduced to New Zealand to create a fur industry and are now widespread across the country. They have had a significant impact on New Zealand's native species and ecosystems. They are opportunistic omnivores meaning they will eat just about anything, including all parts of a tree (leaves, buds, flowers, and fruit), insects and bird eggs. They will sometimes graze a single tree so heavily it will die. They can have a huge impact on the tastiest tree species like rata, tree fuchsia, and kamahi. Not only do they eat birds' eggs, but they also can live in cavities in trees, which are also nesting sites for birds such as kakariki.

How can I tell if there are possums around my house?

You may never see a possum but still have one in your area. Look for signs such as scratches or bite marks on the trunk of a tree (see above) or possum droppings (small brownish to black pellets with rounded ends).

Evidence of their feeding includes the peels of citrus fruit being eaten or leaves eaten on trees. You may see broken branches with missing or ripped leaves.

What trap should I use to catch possums?

Many types of traps have been developed over the years to kill possums. We have chosen to use Trapinators for the urban New Plymouth project. The Trapinator is an effective trap that can be set off the ground (away from pets and small hands) and is easy to use for those new to trapping.

The Trapinator has also met National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee certification for possums, meaning it will kill the possum in a humane manner.

What is the best bait to use?

Apple, citrus (with peel) or carrot pieces, no bigger than about 3cm x 3cm. Anything much bigger may cause the trap mechanism to operate incorrectly. Another option is to apply a possum paste or dough (available for purchase online).

Taranaki Taku Tūranga
Towards Predator-Free Taranaki

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What is a white blaze?

After you install your trap it is beneficial to apply a blaze to the area below the trap. This is a visual lure that attracts the possum to the trap. The blaze is a mixture of four parts flour to one part icing sugar. You can also add in some cinnamon, aniseed or curry as a further deterrent to cats.

Where is the best place to set the trap?

The trap should be set on a tree, about 1.5m off the ground. The best tree is one that shows signs of possum, such as scratches or bite marks.

How should I dispose of the carcass?

The possum carcass should be disposed of either by burying it in your garden or bush area (great fertiliser if you want to plant a native on top!) or by placing it into a bag and then in your red-lidded rubbish bin.

What should I do if my trap kills a female possum and there is a live joey in her pouch or on her back?

Young joeys will not survive on their own so should not be released, and remember they will grow to cause the same issues as their parent. With this in mind humane euthanasia is the most appropriate option.

Are the traps safe around my children?

With proper education and trap placement, yes. However, the trap is designed to catch whatever triggers it, be it a possum or a child's hand. If someone sticks their hand into the trap they will likely get hurt. It's important to talk to children about the traps, teach them to not touch them and explain what could happen if they do. A little bit of child aversion may also be a good idea – i.e. setting the trap off in front of the kids so they can see how loud, powerful and potentially dangerous it is.

What about my cat? Will the trap harm my cat?

Trapinator traps have not been found to catch cats as long as they are used properly. There are several things you can do to reduce the risk to cats. First, never put a meat or fish bait into the trap. Instead use a fruit bait like apple or citrus and a lure such as cinnamon; all scents that possums like and cats dislike. Second, proper placement of the trap in a vertical position well off the ground is key. Finally, try aversion training your cat.

What is cat aversion training?

There are steps you can take to deter your cat from approaching your trap! With your cat at a safe distance set the trap off by flicking the red lever quickly to the unset position, creating a loud noise, scaring the cat. Repeat as necessary so the cat becomes afraid to go near the trap.

If you are still concerned, install the trap but don't set it. Watch your cat to ensure it stays away. After a few days, once the novelty of the new trap wears off, you can set the trap.

How often should I check the trap?

Initially, every day. After some time and if you are not catching often, once a week will be fine.

Why am I not catching anything?

If you are not catching anything and you've been at it for a couple of months you have a few options. Try moving your trap to a different part of your backyard – look for possum signs such as scratches on trees. Another option is to change up your bait.

Should I trap all of the time?

Ideally, yes, you should bait and set your trap all of the time. This will help to control the possum population in your area. However, the most important time of year to be trapping is the spring and autumn when possums are most active.

What if I want to move the trap or I am having problems with it?

Please contact us on:

Email: pftaranaki@trc.govt.nz

Phone: 0800 736 222

We're always happy to help.

Taranaki
Regional Council