

Pet Dogs and Possums

Our beloved pet dogs can come into conflict with western ringtail possums, sometimes causing injury or death. Predation of western ringtail possums by domestic dogs is listed as a threat to the species in the [Western Ringtail Possum Recovery Plan](#). Levels of dog ownership in Busselton are four to eight times greater per hectare than the average fox density in the south-west forests.

However, it is possible for dogs to coexist in harmony with possums. So, what can we do as dog owners?

Sleeping indoors with the family pack

The best way to reduce the threat is to keep our dogs indoors while possums are foraging and moving through the landscape at night. Dogs can easily be trained to toilet before we go to bed and as we get up in the morning. There are other benefits to having your dog stay indoors as dogs do not have the superior ability for night-vision like cats do. If they cannot distinguish what something is at night-time they can resort to excessive barking and even develop anxiety issues. Dogs are pack animals and denning indoors with the family is the most natural sleeping situation for them.

While transitioning your dog to sleeping indoors, you may need to supervise their toileting. Go outside with them before bed to ensure they are focused on the task of toileting before sleep. We can help them stick to the task by rewarding positive recalls and rewarding toileting. By focusing attention to the owner and giving rewards, we can shift the focus away from any possum that may be present. You might call it possum aversion training.

Possum Friendly Fencing

If your dog needs to stay outdoors at night-time when possums are out and about, there are fencing options available that can help to protect possums.

Possum grip

Possums are vulnerable when they are moving across the top of low fences and on slippery surfaces like Colorbond fences. Dogs can jump on the side of a fence and knock a possum into the yard. Dogs have also been known to use the corner of a fence to jump from one side to the other to gain height and reach a possum.

If you have a slippery fence like Colorbond or metal capping that is already 1.8m high, affix a run of timber such as dressed pine along the top to allow the possum to more effectively grip if a dog jumps on the fence. The timber may also reduce the

pitter patter noise of a possum running along the top of the metal fence during the night.



Possum grip

Fence height extension

If you have a short fence down the sides or back of your property, you can raise the height to 1.8m by adding an extension. This will keep possums safe up high away from jumping dogs. There are many fence extension options that can beautify your fence and add additional privacy.

Super six fences are often shorter than 1.8m allowing more room to add an extension. If your super six fence is fragile and a bit crumbly, it is advised not to add an extension. Instead, you could add metal capping and a timber run.

If you are installing a fence retrofit option, we would love to hear from you as we're looking to install remote cameras to monitor the retrofits in action. Please email us at admin@southwestnrm.org.au to register your interest.



Fence height extension

Possum Bridge

If your neighbour has a dog and you would like to give possums a safe passage through your yard, you could build a possum bridge on the inside of your property.



Possum bridge

You can watch a video about a possum bridge here: <https://youtu.be/sVpDnpefStk>

Permissions

Before affixing anything to your boundary fence or wall, it is important to seek permission from your neighbour. You can download a neighbour letter template from our website.

After you have a fence retrofit design, it is recommended to check with your local council before commencing as there are height and visual permeability requirements for fences facing the street. The standard fence height for backyard side and rear fences is 1.8m height.

If your fence is structurally compromised (crumbly or likely to fall), it is advised to replace the fence first and avoid affixing anything to the fence as this will increase the likelihood of the fence failing.

If you are in a rental property, you will need approval from the property owner.