



Staying Safe from Rattlesnakes - Part 2
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When we think of a rattlesnake, we visualize it tightly coiled, rattling its tail loudly, head raised, ready to strike at anything that moves, and always on the attack. We are convinced that every encounter will be deadly, with us as the hapless victims. This is more myth than fact. But here is important information to know, to remain safe from rattlesnakes in El Dorado County.

Most rattlesnakes prefer to avoid confrontation. When sensing a threat, a rattlesnake can remain still and silent, able to hide by blending into the surrounding environment. If possible, it will retreat. If more alarmed, it will shake its tail back and forth, producing the iconic rattling sound, which is intended to alert potential enemies. If retreating would further endanger the snake, the defensive behavior of coiling in place warns other creatures to stay back. A rattlesnake does not have to be coiled to strike and bite: it can do that from any position. It will strike at a potential meal, or defend itself from perceived threats, but given enough space and time to escape, it will move away quickly to avoid confrontation.

Rattlesnakes are often incorrectly described as "poisonous," which means harmful to eat. Instead, rattlesnakes are "venomous," injecting a toxic venom via long, hollow, movable fangs connected to venom glands. This venom quickly immobilizes their prey. Rattlesnakes usually do not bite without provocation as this action depletes the valuable supply of venom essential to kill and digest their food.

There is no definitive proof for the assumption that bites from juvenile rattlesnakes are more dangerous than those of adults. Experts disagree, particularly because adult rattlesnakes have more stored venom to inject than juveniles. Regardless of age or experience, all rattlesnakes are able to control exactly how much venom is injected during a bite. It is important to know that dead snakes and decapitated snake heads are still able to inject venom. And a bite from a live

rattlesnake, regardless of age or size, should be treated as a serious medical emergency, requiring immediate treatment and possible hospitalization.

Even a "dry bite" (no venom) requires medical attention. About 20% of adult rattlesnake bites are dry, and the other 80% can range from minimal to lethal injections. If you have been envenomated, tingling and swelling will develop within five to ten minutes. If possible, wash the bitten area with soap and water. Do not pack the wound in ice, drink alcohol, or attempt to tourniquet, lance, or suck the venom out, as this can cause more harm. Instead, remain quiet, keep your heart rate down, and move as little as possible. Remove any rings, watches or tight clothing, and keep the bite area below your heart. Call 911 and go to the nearest medical facility immediately.

The best way to avoid rattlesnake bites is to wear jeans and steel-toed leather boots outside, carry a stick to move concealing brush or keep a snake away, and make noise while you walk or work. Snakes can be found under tarps, curled up in tires, stretched out under door sills or garage weather stripping, in hidden locations in an open garage, or under trash cans. Keep your garage doors down; pull trash cans out slowly; avoid reaching under shrubs and piles of leaves, into cracks and crevices, or into stone walls, without examining those locations closely first; step on (instead of over) rocks and downed tree trunks; and pay close attention to what is around you.

If you see or hear a rattlesnake, remain still and evaluate your situation. If a snake is not visible, determine where the rattling is coming from, so you do not accidentally move closer to the snake, further threatening it. Then, back away slowly and quietly. Leave the snake alone! Do not provoke it, throw anything at it, or make any sudden movements that may trigger a strike. If you see a snake, call 911 or a snake-removal company right away, so the snake can be safely removed and relocated, and not killed.

Fear of being bitten has resulted in rattlesnakes being needlessly killed. It is essential to understand that rattlesnakes are valuable, necessary predators within our environment. Reasonable watchfulness makes it possible to avoid snake bites. Let's respect these amazing native creatures, and give them the space they need, so we can coexist in peace. You can find a University of California IPM Pest Note on Rattlesnakes at:

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74119.html>

Join us for an on-line public education class on Shade Gardening November 7th from 9 am to 10 am (part 1) and on November 14th from 9 am to 10 am (part 2). Learn how shade gardens add cool beauty, texture and color to your landscape. Join this talented team of Master Gardeners to learn what plants thrive in all kinds of shade --- dappled to deep. Register in advance for this class: https://ucanr.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYlf-uqrT8sGN2ooAuY-JwKF7_wU0stauup. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the class.

Due to the pandemic, Master Gardener events will for the foreseeable future continue to be limited. Please see our calendar of events for learning opportunities. We realize our public classes are valued by county residents and we are doing our best to provide virtual learning opportunities.

Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard remotely and can still answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the "Ask a

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Master Gardener” option on our website: mgeldorado.ucanr.edu. We’ll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news.