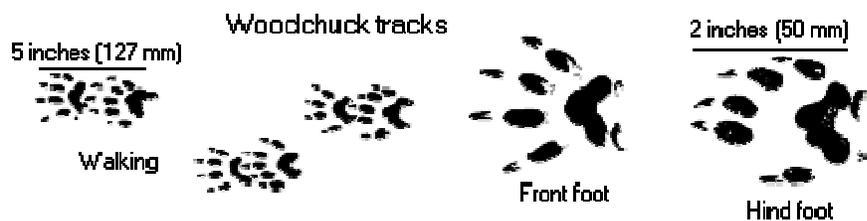




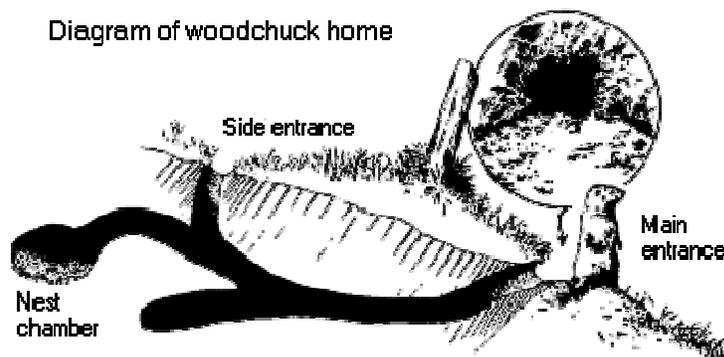
## WOODCHUCKS (GROUNDHOGS)

The **woodchuck** (*Marmota monax*), also known as a groundhog, is a rodent of the family **Sciuridae**, belonging to the group of large ground squirrels known as *Marmots*.

**Description:** The common Woodchuck, or “groundhog” varies from 16-27 inches in length; it has short, powerful legs and a medium-long, bushy, and somewhat flattened tail. The long, coarse fur of the back is a grizzled grayish brown with a yellowish or reddish cast. Woodchucks can weigh anywhere from 4-14 pounds, being lightest in spring when they are just out of hibernation and heaviest in fall prior to hibernation.



**Habitat:** Woodchucks can create burrows up to 30 feet long, excavated under stumps, rocks or edges of buildings. The main entrances to their tunnels are obvious: 8-12 inches across, with big mounds of dirt nearby. The tunnels lead to an enlarged chamber, 3-6 feet underground, which contains the nest. Though groundhogs are mostly solitary in nature, several individuals may occupy the same burrow.



**Diet:** Woodchucks feed on grasses, weeds and garden crops, even raiding picnic areas for food. They will also feed on buds and twigs in early spring before green vegetation appears. Woodchucks forage for food during daylight hours but are most active during early morning and mid afternoon.

**Habits:** Woodchucks are one of the few species that enter a “true” hibernation. They typically hibernate from *October* to *March* or *April*. Often, but not always the case, Woodchucks will create a winter burrow for hibernation separate from their normal habitat.

**Woodchucks as Pests:** Woodchucks are considered by some people to be pests. Home gardens provide an easy meal for these animals and are easily destroyed with their introduction. Their immense burrows can also compromise building structures and provide entrance for other pests such as mice and rats.

### Humane Control Measures

- The Philadelphia Department of Public Health does not trap woodchucks primarily because they are not a disease vector. There are, however, some relatively easy and safe ways to discourage Woodchucks from entering your property.
- Epsom salts can be placed around food sources to discourage feeding. Food sources can be anything from berries growing on overhanging brush and flowering plants to a home garden in your backyard.
- Motion devices may be installed to frighten the animals upon entering their burrow or feeding area.
- Ammonia soaked rags placed around burrows can deter harboring.
- Chicken wire buried into the ground and surrounding your property will prevent the groundhog from burrowing under your home. More importantly, the buried portion should be bent at a 90 degree angle, 1 foot below the surface.
- Some people have tied bright red ribbons or put CDs around burrows because their reflective properties may scare away groundhogs.



Animal Management Services  
Environmental Health Services  
111 W. Hunting Park Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19140

(215) 685-9009  
[www.phila.gov/health](http://www.phila.gov/health)