Armadillos have become the talk of the town throughout South Carolina. They are often found digging in gardens, flower beds, or yards searching for food or taking a very long “nap” upside down near the road. There are currently 20 species of armadillo in existence, but the Nine-banded Armadillo (Dasypus novemcinctus) is the only species found in the United States. The name “armadillo” from the Spanish translation of “little armored one” and the Nine-banded Armadillo gets its name from the nine bands that wrap around its torso.

Adult armadillos weigh 8-17 pounds and have 28-32 peg-like teeth with no front teeth. Armadillos have poor eyesight and hearing. They are agile runners and exceptional swimmers. They can hold their breath for up to six minutes making it easier for them to swim long distances or to forage for food while digging in the soil. Female armadillos have one litter per year in the spring. The litter consists of four young, all of which are the same sex. Armadillo pups will reach sexual maturity after one year.

Armadillos prefer warm, wet climates and live in forested or grassland habitats with dense, shady cover that serves as protection from predators and harsh environmental conditions. Armadillos primarily feed on insects, larvae, small vertebrates, and eggs. They cause most of their damage while rooting or digging in the soil for food. They are nocturnal and tend to avoid activity during extreme temperatures.

Signs of possible armadillo presence may include: uprooted flowers and ornamentals, damage to turf, disrupted insect mounds, and broken yellow jacket nests. They create several “cone-shaped” holes, measuring 1-3” deep and 3-5” wide, in the ground when rooting. Their burrows measure 7-8” in diameter and up to 15 feet in depth. They can have several burrows in one area.

To discourage armadillos, remove cover or brush from areas where you might expect them. They prefer to dig burrows in areas with cover so removing the cover will make the area less attractive and feel less safe. If you choose to use exclusion techniques, build a fence at least 3 feet high and that is buried 12-18 inches deep (deeper in sandy soils). Keep in mind, armadillos can jump at least 3-4 feet high if provoked. There are no known frightening devices or repellents known to be effective and no toxicants registered for use on armadillos. If you choose to try a repellent, check the label on several mole and gopher repellents to see if armadillo is listed. Sweeney’s Mole & Gopher Repellent lists armadillos on its label. It contains castor oil that makes their food source and environment smell and taste unpleasant.
In South Carolina, when it comes to shooting armadillos, there is no closed season on armadillos on private lands. You must still have a valid hunting license. Armadillos that are causing damage may be shot where it is legal to discharge a firearm. Recommended firearms include either a shotgun with No. 4 to BB-sized shot or .22-caliber rifle. Try to avoid using firearms with low velocity rounds, the bullet tends to ricochet and cause injury. Night hunting is permitted from the last day of February to the 1st of July as long as the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) is notified beforehand. Please contact SCDNR for further restrictions.

To trap armadillos, either a single-door or a 2-door cage is recommended. It is best to set traps along pathways to burrows and along structures, including fences, buildings, etc. The trap sets work best when using “wings” to guide the armadillo into the trap. These wings are typically made from 1 x 6-inch boards anchored into the ground. There is no need to use baits when trapping armadillos, especially if you’re using traps with wings. If you do feel the need to use baits, spoiled fruits, rotten mean, or mealworms are known to work.

SCDNR prohibits the relocation and translocation of trapped wildlife. Relocation is moving an individual from one location within its home range to another location within the same home range. Translocation is moving a free-ranging animal from their original home range or established territory. Once an animal is trapped, it needs to be quickly and humanely dispatched. Contact SCDNR for a list of wildlife removal services. These services will typically cost a fee. SCDNR also has a list of certified technical assistance providers who can help you.

Evidence of Armadillo rooting and digging damage