ARMADILLOS

THOSE PESKY LITTLE ARMORED FELLOWS

While armadillos are not a serious economic or health threat in Louisiana, Associate County Agent Perry Dautreuil said they can still be quite a nuisance, not to mention a good dinner.

"He really gives us problems when he starts coming into ornamental beds," Dautreuil said. Their favorite fare is typically the tender plant roots and bugs that are found in moist, well fertilized flower beds, he said.

"That's what he normally eats in the wild, which can make him really be a problem in some of the best landscape work near the woods or river," Dautreuil said.

Armadillos found their way to Louisiana from Texas on oil equipment brought in during the oil boom, he said. And actually, Louisiana is a more suitable habitat for the armored animals.

"Texas has them, but if they had a choice they would live in Louisiana," Dautreuil said. While that might not ease the minds of avid Louisiana gardeners having trouble with the pests. One way is exclusion, or simply putting up a barrier to keep the armadillos out of gardens. However, there are some drawbacks to this method of defense.

Dautreuil said. "Exclusion is certainly the most environmentally sound way, but the limiting factor is cost," he said. "You have to compare the cost of prevention with the cost of damage."

Dautreuil said the animals' name comes from the Spanish word for "little armored fellow," and because of how they look people think catching and destroying them is a good way to exterminate.

"People think because they are little armored fellows they would easily drown, but they are excellent swimmers," he said. Another way to get rid of the pests is to find their dens and asphyxiate them by attaching a hose to an internal combustion gasoline engine exhaust, Dautreuil said. But there are precautions to take with that. Because they are such good swimmers, he said armadillos can hold their breath for extended periods of time, so would-be fumigators should funnel the fumes in for a long time.

Dautreuil also warned to be sure to use the fumes from an engine, not the fumes from gasoline, which can be dangerous. Setting live traps also seems to work well, Dautreuil added. Once they have been trapped, take them to an unpopulated wooded area to release, he said.

If all else fails in extermination attempts, Dautreuil suggested having the armadillos as a main course on the dining room table. "They are one of the only unusual meats that when you taste if you won't say it tastes like chicken," Dautreuil said. "In fact, it kind of tastes like pork."

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ARMADILLOS FACTS

- The armadillo has a head and body length of about 15 to 17 inches and the tail measures an additional 14 to 16 inches.
- The armadillo has 28 to 32 teeth but no front teeth.
- Both the male and female are the same size, look alike and generally have the same habits.
- Armadillos always bear quadruplets. All four are the same size and are identical.
- They can normally be found in dense, shady cover. Although they are often seen during the day, armadillos are much more active at night, early morning or late afternoon.
- Not only are armadillos good swimmers, but they can walk on the bottom of the body of water when they get tired of swimming.
- Ninety percent of the armadillo's diet is insects. It is particularly fond of earthworms, bugs, grubs, all kinds of ants, scorpions, tarantulas and any invertebrate it can catch.

(Information from the Cooperative Extension Service)

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CARE AND COOKING OF ARMADILLOS

According to Cooperative Extension Service information, there are some steps that should be taken to ensure a good armadillo dinner. First, it is best to shoot the armadillo in the head or catch it and break its neck.

As soon as possible after taking the armadillo, skin it from the underside by using a sharp knife and splitting the skin from just in front of the anal opening to the neck. Be careful not to puncture the abdominal cavity. Peel the armadillo skin similar to skinning a rabbit or a squirrel. Remove the entrails carefully, cutting around piece and removing the anal portion intact.

Remove all fat from the front and back legs of the carcass and wash completely. Soak the quartered pieces or whole armadillo for 24 hours in water with one-half cup of salt added.

FOR BARBECUED ARMADILLO:

Prepare the carcass by soaking overnight in salted water in the refrigerator. The armadillo can be barbecued whole or cut into frying size pieces. Be sure to cut lightly brown the pieces in butter before barbecuing.

Place the whole animal or pieces in a covered pan with water and boil for 30 to 60 minutes or until tender. Drain, salt and pepper using plenty of salt and pepper, put in a shallow pan and taste of black pepper, put into a shallow pan and taste of black pepper. Cover with a sauce from gasoline, which is composed of hickory and Worcestershire sauce.

Cover pan with aluminum foil and cook slowly in oven for about an hour, basting with sauce 30 minutes into the cooking. Cover with a sauce from gasoline, which is composed of hickory and Worcestershire sauce.

FOR FRIED ARMADILLO:

Place the armadillo pieces in lightly salted water and boil until tender, usually 20 to 30 minutes. After cooking, remove the pieces, pepper an cover shortening.

Cover both sides, cover and cook slowly 20 to 40 minutes over a medium fire. If gravy is desired, use from the boiling liquid. Pour this into the skillet, salt and pepper to taste, and stir until it thickens. Add water or broth if necessary.