

September 26, 2004

NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

**Dennis Smith
County Extension Agent-Agriculture
Gregg County**

With the large number of calls we have been receiving at the Extension Office, it is apparent that the armadillos are hard at work in many of the home lawns in Gregg and the surrounding counties.

The armadillo is active primarily from twilight through early morning hours in the summer. In winter it may be active only during the day. The armadillo usually digs a burrow 7 or 8 inches in diameter and up to 15 feet in length for shelter and raising young. Armadillos often have several dens in an area to use for escape.

The young are born in a nest within the burrow. The female produces only one litter each year in March or April. The litter always consists of quadruplets of the same sex.

The armadillo has poor eyesight, but a keen sense of smell. In spite of its cumbersome appearance, the agile armadillo can run well when in danger. It is a good swimmer and is also able to walk across the bottom of small streams.

More than 90% of the armadillo's diet is made up of insects and their larvae. Armadillos also feed on earthworms, scorpions, spiders, and other invertebrates.

Most armadillo damage occurs as a result of their rooting in lawns, golf courses, vegetable gardens, and flower beds. Characteristic signs of armadillo activity are shallow holes, 1 to 3 inches deep and 3 to 5 inches wide, which are dug in search of food. They also uproot flowers and other ornamental plants.

Armadillos can be captured in 10 x 12 x 32 inch live or box traps, such as Havahart, Tomahawk, or homemade types. The best locations to set traps are along pathways to armadillo burrows and along fences or other barriers where the animals may travel. In the home lawn, set the trap in an area where the armadillo has been working.

The best trap is the type that can be opened at both ends. Its effectiveness can be enhanced by using "wings" of 1 x 4 inch or 1 x 6 inch boards about 6 feet long to funnel the target animal into the trap. This set does not need baiting. If bait is desired, use overripe or spoiled fruit.

Since most of the damage armadillos cause is a result of their rooting for insects and other invertebrates in the soil, soil insecticides may be used to remove this food source and make areas less attractive to armadillos.

Plans to construct an armadillo trap may be obtained from the Gregg County Extension Office.

Leaves for Compost

Autumn is here, and with it comes the yearly chore of keeping the lawn free of fallen leaves. They should be removed from the lawn, since a heavy blanket of leaves can smother a lawn if allowed to remain. In previous years, leaves were burned or hauled to the dump to be burned or buried. Air pollution controls have made the smell of burning leaves a thing of the past. Actually, leaves are much too valuable to burn. A better procedure is to compost them, to provide a ready source of composted soil for use in preparing flower and shrub borders, potted plants, and top-dressing for the yard. The simplest method of composting leaves or other vegetable matter is to build up alternate 4- to 6-inch layers of vegetable matter with 2 to 4 inches of good garden soil. Sprinkling a commercial fertilizer on each layer of vegetable matter will hasten decomposition. One-half pound or one cupful of 10-10-10, 10-6-4, 10-20-0, or the equivalent, per ten square feet of vegetable-matter layer is sufficient. Manure, if available and free of weeds, may also be added to good advantage to the soil layer. The compost pile should be 4 to 6 feet wide, and of any desired length. The top layer should consist of soil, and the surface of the pile should slope toward the center, forming a basin to hold water. The layers of leaves should be watered thoroughly as they are spread out, and when the pile is completed, additional water should be added periodically to keep the material moist but not soggy. The compost should be turned or mixed with a garden fork or shovel every three or four months, and within six months to a year, it should be ready for use.

Dennis Smith can be contacted at the Gregg County Extension Office by e-mail at dq-smith@tamu.edu or telephone at: 903-236-8429.

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.