

Beware of Snakes in Bexar County

By Candy Roach

As our weather warms up, snakes are on the move right now, so be aware when you are hiking or working in your yard.

The majority of snakes are harmless and all snakes serve a purpose in our environment, including the poisonous ones. [There are 105 types of snakes in Texas and 15 are potentially dangerous.](#) Of the 15 dangerous snakes in Texas, 4 of them are found in Bexar County. These include the Western Diamondback rattlesnakes, Coral snakes, Western Cottonmouth snakes and Copperhead snakes.

Per the [CDC Website](#), it is estimated that 8,000 people per year receive venomous bites in the US, with about 5 deaths. The majority of the bites occur on the hands and on the leg above the ankle. Across Texas, there are several types of rattlesnakes but only the Western Diamondback lives in Bexar county.

Rattlesnakes only bite in self-defense so it is best to leave them alone. Many bites occur when people are trying to kill them. Snakes are usually shy, and will try to exit quickly if something approaches them. The rattlesnake is the exception. There are snake removal companies in San Antonio that know how to safely handle snakes, call them when needed.

In 1988, an analysis done of 227 cases of venomous snakebites found that 44% of bites occurred during accidental contact, such as stepping on the animal. More than 55% resulted from the victim's handling them, and in 28% of these cases, the victims were intoxicated. The typical snakebite victim is male, under thirty, with a high blood-alcohol concentration at the time he is bitten. Yet only 0.2% of all snakebite victims die each year, and most of them received no medical treatment or first aid. (Steve Grenard, Aug. '00)
In 2019 there were two known deaths, one in Georgia and one in Alabama.

It is extremely important to seek medical assistance if you believe you have been bitten by a snake. The Western Diamondback Rattlesnake and the Coral snake are the two you are most likely to see here.

Western Diamondback Rattlesnake [-- Click this link to watch a short, informative YouTube video about the Texas Western Diamondback Rattlesnake](#)



Western Diamondback Rattle Snake - Note the black and white racoon banded tail, Viper shaped head, tail rattles and diamond shaped pattern along the back.



Baby Western Diamondback Rattle Snake - Note the black and white racoon banded tail, Viper shaped head, tail nub and diamond shaped pattern along the back. Blue-black tongue is also a characteristic.

This snake is a pit viper and can quickly and accurately strike one-third or more of their body length from any position. Rattlesnakes may use their rattles as a warning when they feel threatened, although they do not always rattle before biting. Rattlesnakes may be found sunning themselves near logs, boulders, or open areas. The Western Diamondback Rattlesnake has a distinct diamond shaped pattern on its back. It has a thick body with a thick tail with 1 or more rattles, viper shaped head, serpent eyes, a facial pit between its eyes and nostrils and a blue-black tongue.

Normally rattlesnakes are passing through your yards, rather than living in them. Their presence may increase if you live in an area under construction where their natural habitat has been destroyed and they are looking for a new home. You are also more likely to see them if you live close to a greenbelt. Take precautions in spring, especially if you have inquisitive pets or kids. Survey your property for snakes before letting pets and kids play outside, if you live in an area where snakes have been sighted.

To discourage them from coming to your yard, eliminate their food source and make your yard less desirable to them. Keep your yards neat and clutter-free of debris such as leaf litter, rock piles and wood stacked on the ground near the house. Keep your grass mowed to its recommended height, since overgrown turf can offer a good place to hide. Put your firewood on a **raised platform**. The rattlesnake is a poor climber so raising your wood up will be less attractive to it. If you have a bird feeder, seeds on the ground can attract field mice to your yard, and they are a tasty meal for the snake. Clean up food beneath your feeders, if it tends to build up.

Finally, when working in your yard, **never** stick your hands under shrubs or bushes to remove leaf litter or branches without checking the area. Take care when moving rocks, lawn ornaments or stones because these are areas where snakes may be living underneath. If you can't see underneath shrubs, just poke them first with a garden tool handle such as a rake, just to scare anything out of the area. You can also come across small rat snakes or checkered garden snakes, both are harmless and good for your gardens.



Note the vibrant colors of the Coral Snake



Red milk snakes are harmless and have a white, yellow or tan body with reddish banded blotches rimmed in black. They are often confused with coral snakes.

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Coral Snakes

Coral snakes can be confused with nonvenomous king snakes (sometimes called milk snakes), which have similar colored bands, although in a different arrangement. Their colors are much more vibrant. Coral snakes tend to hide in leaf piles, or burrow into the ground.

As a child, growing up in San Antonio, my mother told me and my sisters, "Red and Yellow Kill a Fellow, Red and Black is a Friend of Jack." We now know that this is actually not an accurate statement because some non-venomous snakes can have color yellow and vice-versa for the Coral snake. My advice is to leave professional to relocate them.

The coral snake is feared because of the toxicity of its venom; however, there has only been 1 recorded death on record in the USA since 1967, involving a man in Florida who was trying to kill a Coral snake. Coral snakes have a very small mouth, and will only attack if they perceive their life is threatened. They are a shy and docile snake and will leave peacefully, if given a chance.

Their preferred habitat is leaf litter and they are most likely to be seen early in the morning or in the evening after temperatures cool down.

You are most likely to see snakes now as the weather warms up in the springtime, because they are breaking hibernation and seeking a mate, and again as the weather cools down in the fall.

So, stay alert and clean up your yards. When out hiking, stay on the path and out of tall grass. Snakes love our wildflowers as much as you do.

I strongly recommend that you purchase a pamphlet called "Snakes of Central Texas / A Guide to Common and Notable Species" (\$8). You can get this pamphlet at any grocery store, book store, gas station and of course [Amazon](#). It is useful in helping to identify what snake you are seeing in your garden or as you are out hiking.

Happy Gardening!
Candy Roach