

Get The Facts About Gopher Tortoises: Urban Areas



Gopher tortoises prefer to live in dry, sandy environments, however, this is also where people build homes. As a result, habitat loss has caused tortoise populations to decline. Residents can still provide habitat for tortoises in the open, grassy areas of their neighborhoods. The following suggestions can help homeowners and gopher tortoises safely coexist:

- Tortoise burrows can be identified by the half-moon shape of the burrow entrance. Avoid disturbing the area around the burrow.
- An active burrow has a mound of soil extending outward from the entrance, created when a tortoise digs its burrow.
- Do not put a tortoise in water. They are terrestrial animals that do not swim well.
- Do not attempt to handle or feed a tortoise.
- If you see a tortoise in the roadway, you can move it across the road in the direction it was headed. **Do not put your life in danger to move a tortoise.**
- Take an injured tortoise to the nearest licensed wildlife rehabilitator or call the FWC.



Jason Emmett

Gopher tortoises and pets

Gopher tortoises have coexisted with native animals in Florida for centuries, but many tortoises have been injured or killed by domestic pets, particularly dogs. These encounters can be avoided by:

- Training pets to avoid tortoises and their burrows.
- Creating a barrier or changing existing fences to separate pets from tortoises. Tortoises should still move freely around your property.
- Never leaving pets unsupervised near tortoise burrows.
- Contacting your county animal control office for assistance if a pet enters a burrow.

Legal protection

The gopher tortoise is a threatened species. It is illegal to damage, destroy, harass, or kill gopher tortoises, their burrows or their eggs. To report a violation call the FWC's toll free Wildlife Alert Hotline at 1-888-404-3922 or report it online at: [MyFWC.com/contact/wildlife-alert/](https://myfwc.com/contact/wildlife-alert/)

Relocation

Gopher tortoise relocation is only appropriate where development is proposed within 25 feet of a tortoise burrow. Landowners must obtain permits from the FWC before relocating a gopher tortoise. For concerns regarding a burrow under an existing structure, contact the gopher tortoise conservation biologist in your region: [MyFWC.com/license/wildlife/gopher-tortoise-permits/contacts/](https://myfwc.com/license/wildlife/gopher-tortoise-permits/contacts/).

Learn more about living with gopher tortoises in urban areas, landscaping with tortoise-friendly plants, and ways to get involved by contacting the gopher tortoise office at **850-921-1030** or visit [MyFWC.com/GopherTortoise](https://myfwc.com/GopherTortoise).



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