

7 GENTLE WAYS TO USE A BROOM IN SPRING

1. The Raccoon in the Kitchen. What do we expect, really, opening wide the doors for spring-cleaning? A raccoon that visits in the daytime is not likely to be rabid; it is just looking for pie and cookies. Fortunately, the broom is at hand—when used properly, this is the tool of choice for nearly all household wildlife encounters. If the raccoon is disinclined to leave when you ask it to, then *without cornering the animal or blocking its way*, wave the brush end of the broom suggestively at its bum, and direct it out the door. It may assume the disaffected look of an aloof teenager. Be insistent.

2. The Opossum in the Bathroom. Once discovered, the opossum will bare all fifty teeth and hiss in a convincing effort to look ferocious and inedible to an enormous predator such as yourself. But in reality the opossum is quite shy, which is why it is hiding in the quiet bathroom, not the busy kitchen. If it becomes overly frightened and falls into its defensive corpse-like state, then no amount of prodding with your broom will induce it to revive. The opossum will be your houseguest for some hours. Consider yourself fortunate—few humans are able to study North America's only marsupial up close.

3. The Bat in the Bedroom. There should be no swatting and waving of the broom as is typical in bat encounters. Sure, bats are potentially rabid, fly erratically, and may secretly be vampires. But they are also delicate wild creatures, and now here is a very frightened bat in your care. Open all the windows and close the door; get your broom and stand quietly in the corner. At dusk the bat will start flying around the room and, one hopes, out the window. If it has snuggled into a curtain or is hanging in a houseplant, then stay in your corner and ever so gently use the stick end of the broom to coax the bat into flight.

4. The Flicker on the Gutter. Yes, you fancy yourself a bird lover, and flickers are gorgeous woodpeckers, and their drumming is a fabulous rite of spring, and we all want to be enlightened about coexisting with wildlife. But good lord, it's five a.m.! No one will judge you. Take the stick end of the broom, lean out the bedroom window, and pound on the gutter until the bird leaves.

5. The Crow on the Porch Rail. This crow is likely accustomed to finding dog food on back porches, or was tamed by someone who has fed it since it was young. Such tame-ish crows are often beaten to death with brooms by people who think the bird has come to attack their dachshunds or their toddlers. If the crow bothers you, then shake your broom at it. But you may consider sitting outside with the crow for a bit. Say something pleasant and look the bird in the eye. Crows are excellent extraverbal conversationalists.

6. The Chickadee in the Living Room. *Put down the broom.* Open all the windows and doors. If the chickadee leaves, you can go on with your housework. If it exhausts itself and ends up in a panting heap in the corner, walk confidently over with a dust cloth, gently cover the bird, and take it outside. If you like, set the bird on your open palm and allow yourself the harmless imagining that it rests there briefly because it knows you are helping, rather than because it is so frightened it has forgotten, in this moment, how to fly. Feel the warm belly and the wildly beating heart. After it does fly, make yourself some tea. Who could go back to cleaning after the wonder of a bird in house and hand?

7. Moths in the Entry Lamp, Bees on the Dessert Tray. Butterflies, sugar ants, another bird, a house mouse. Breathe deep, and put the broom back in the closet. Our homes are semipermeable. We live in more-than-human neighborhoods. Be careful what you sweep. 🐾

Tell us about your spring-cleaning encounters at www.orionmagazine.org/enumeration.