



## FRIEND OR FOE?

### Armadillos like to eat garden pests

By Betty Tovar

PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY MICHAEL

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Growing up in the Mission Valley area, I saw many small animals on our land, such as raccoons, skunks, possums, and, of course, armadillos.

Did you know that the nine-banded armadillo, a distant cousin of the sloth and anteater, is the official Texas state small mammal?

Who would have thought the state would choose this particular small animal? It was given this honor in 1995, and described as an animal that “possesses many remarkable and unique traits, some of which parallel the attributes that distinguish a true Texan, such as a deep respect and need for the land, the ability to change and adapt and a fierce undying love for freedom.” The Spanish translation is “little armored one.”

The nine-banded armadillo is the only one in Texas and the United States, out of 20 species of armadillos in Latin America. It is so named because of the nine accordion-like bands around its middle. According to David G. McComb, “Texas: A Modern History,” “The armadillo crossed the Rio Grande in the 1840s, reached Nueces Bay in the 1890s, and waddled into Louisiana in the mid-1920s.” It has since spread to other states.

They prefer soft earth in order to dig for food with their sharp claws. Adults weigh about 12 to 15 pounds, and are about the size of a small dog. Females bear identical quadruplets in the spring, all either male or female.



**PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY VICTORIA COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PAT PLOWMAN**

**A baby armadillo roaming around at Victoria Educational Gardens**

You may wonder what a discussion about armadillos is doing in a gardening column. Many consider armadillos to be a nuisance because of the uprooted plants and holes they leave in gardens, yards and fields. Their burrows can pose a hazard to humans and livestock who may accidentally step in these areas.

One benefit of their foraging is that they like to eat garden pests like grubs, ants and termites, among other bugs and insects. Their long, sticky tongues help them slurp up their food, and their keen sense of smell helps them to locate it.

Even though they are mammals, they have little hair to help regulate their body temperature, and so in warmer weather they tend to come out in the evenings and at night.

If you find that armadillos are too much of a nuisance in your yard, Bob Vila, home improvement television host, suggests some helpful hints for humanely getting rid of armadillos. Try removing attractants like fallen fruit, dense shrubbery or brush piles that can harbor food sources like insects. Apply natural armadillo repellants like cayenne pepper or garlic in places where they are digging. Set humane armadillo traps and relocate them. For more suggestions look up “How to get Rid of Armadillos” on the internet.



**PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY VICTORIA COUNTY MASTER GARDENER BITSY LEE**

**An armadillo grazing.**

Armadillos have poor eyesight, and so are easy to sneak up on. Watch out though, when startled they can leap up vertically into the air. This sudden and unexpected action helps them to escape and avoid enemies. Predators include cougars, coyotes, dogs, foxes and racoons.

The armadillo in Texas has long been used for various things including as a folk symbol, baskets, pets, races and food. Properly seasoned and grilled, it is said to taste like pork.

Victoria had an annual festival in the 1970s called the “International Armadillo Confab and Exposition.” It was a very popular event at the time and drew large crowds. It featured armadillo races, food, drink, music, arts and crafts and much more.

Hopefully you have learned some new information about this strange prehistoric looking critter that might allow you to appreciate it more and agree that it does “possess many remarkable and unique traits.”

*The Gardeners’ Dirt is written by members of the Victoria County Master Gardener Association, an educational outreach of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension – Victoria County. Mail your questions in care of the Advocate, P.O. Box 1518, Victoria, TX 77901; or [vcmg@vicad.com](mailto:vcmg@vicad.com), or comment on this column at [VictoriaAdvocate.com](http://VictoriaAdvocate.com).*

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