Get the Facts About Gopher Tortoises and Dog Safety

The gopher tortoise is a protected species found throughout Florida. Tortoises may forage or burrow in residential areas. While they are not known to harm dogs, dogs can injure or kill gopher tortoises. Wildlife rehabilitators report as many as half of gopher tortoise injuries are caused by dogs. Many of the injured tortoises must be euthanized or require human care for the rest of their lives. Responsible dog ownership is key to peaceful coexistence.

Please do not let your dog approach gopher tortoises or their burrows.

- It is illegal to harm gopher tortoises or impact their burrows.
- Gopher tortoise burrows provide refuge for more than 350 species.
- Dogs can trap or injure themselves inside burrows.

Dog owners, like you, can help prevent dog-tortoise conflicts.

- **Create a barrier—**Keep your dog from the burrow without penning the tortoise. Use standard or electric fencing, or stake materials such as woven wire into the ground.
- **Use a leash—**Restrain your dog from the tortoise or its burrow.
- **Check your yard—**Wait until the tortoise is in its burrow before letting your dog out.
- **Train your dog—**Use basic or high-level commands to control your dog off-leash.

What to do if a gopher tortoise is injured

Seek help from a permitted wildlife rehabilitator as soon as possible. Transport the tortoise in a large box with air holes. Do not treat the tortoise yourself. Improper medical care can cause more harm than good. Call (850) 921-1030 on weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. or call 1-888-404-3922 after hours and on weekends for a list of permitted wildlife rehabilitators.

For more information on gopher tortoises contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Gopher Tortoise Program at (850) 921-1030 or visit MyFWC.com/GopherTortoise.

Amanda Aitken, Florida Wildlife Hospital

This gopher tortoise was injured in an encounter with a dog. It cannot be released into the wild.

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