

A GUIDE TO

# Possum control

## Pervasive and plant-hungry

This guide focuses on possum control and assumes you're familiar with general predator control practices. For general predator control advice, visit [predatorfreenz.org](http://predatorfreenz.org).



## Understanding possums

Success relies on getting the fundamentals right: good trap placement and clever luring.

Possum control is usually part of wider pest control efforts. Plan carefully, as possum control can cause rat numbers to spike due to more food being available. Toxins can be highly effective for an initial knockdown, and traps can be used to maintain low numbers long-term.

### Behaviour insights

- **Opportunistic omnivores:** Possums eat leaves, buds, fruit, and flowers, but will also eat almost anything, including eggs, chicks, and invertebrates.
- **Visual:** They respond to visual cues such as white traps, flour blazes and coloured lures. Keep white traps and bait stations clean.
- **Highly social:** Possums will follow others to food and interact with interesting new things. Pre-feed unset traps, use interesting lures and blazes to attract possums in groups.
- **Curious creatures:** Change lures and rotate trap and bait station locations every four months to keep things interesting. Take advantage of the seasons by moving traps to trees when they're flowering or fruiting.
- **Promiscuous:** Peak breeding season happens in autumn (March–April) and another in spring (Sept–Oct). Time your control work to match this activity: re-bait, set kill traps, and pulse toxins in bait stations.
- **Great climbers:** They spend most of their time off the ground, so place your traps in trees as well as on the ground.
- **Habitual and local:** Possums stick to their favourite spots and routes. Look for scratch marks and well-used tracks. This will change seasonally; for example, they love pollen from pine trees in spring.
- **Young males roam:** When male juveniles become independent after 9–12 months, they travel further and are easier to catch. Focus efforts from late summer (Feb–March) to take advantage.



## Lures: Fruit and nut

### Top lures

- Fruit, e.g. apple pieces, feijoas, dried apricots
- 'Smooth' lures, e.g. aniseed or cinnamon 'Possum dough' by [traps.co.nz](https://traps.co.nz)
- Mayonnaise (if using an automatic lure dispenser; otherwise, it is hard to place in most traps). Molasses also works well in the wet or winter.

- Possum control is ~80% pre-feeding and visual luring to get them interested, and ~20% actual trapping.
- Flour blaze (flour mixed with icing sugar and vanilla or cinnamon) is a scented and visual lure. Shake it around in an old milk bottle and spread it around to leave a visible scented trail to your trap or bait station. Possums can see white better at night, and once it's on their breath, paws, fur and scat, other possums will pick up on it as a food source.
- Try to avoid lures that blend in. If you're trapping in a plentiful apple orchard, don't use apples. Pick something new and exciting.
- Try combining lures, such as smearing Nutella or smooth lures on fruits, or dipping them in blaze to increase visibility.

## Traps: Types, placement and timing

Most available traps work well for possums, but good placement will increase your success.

This guide includes kill traps and live capture traps. The traps you choose will depend on your location, available time and capacity to deal with a live capture.

### Kill traps

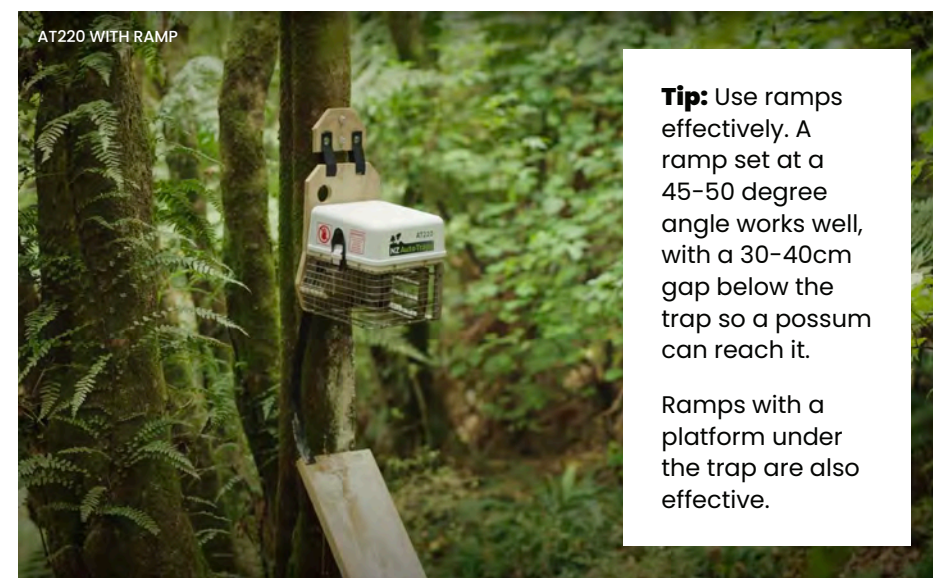
Kill traps are instant, and some are effective for multiple-species (like cats and rats).

#### Recommended kill traps

- **Flipping Timmy:** Easy to set and cost-effective
- **AT220:** Self-resetting and time-saving, but with a higher upfront cost
- **Steve Allan 2 (SA2):** Fairly easy to use, but with an open entrance — use caution in public areas with tracks, pets. Also be wary of kea, kiwi, weka, or other ground-dwelling birds. Use with a ramp.

#### Other trap options

- **Sentinel:** Highly effective but trickier to set than others
- **Trapinator:** Compact, easy to set and cost-effective



**Tip:** Use ramps effectively. A ramp set at a 45–50 degree angle works well, with a 30–40cm gap below the trap so a possum can reach it.

Ramps with a platform under the trap are also effective.



## Live capture traps

Live capture traps work really well for possums. However, it's a legal requirement to check them daily (within 12 hours of sunrise). Remote monitoring technology reduces the need to check all traps manually. Any possums caught in live capture traps must be dispatched humanely (shot by a licensed shooter or using blunt force). Live capture traps should not be used in areas with kea, kiwi, weka, or other ground-dwelling birds.

### There are two main types of live capture traps

- **Cage traps:** Can take longer to capture possums than leg holds, but still effective. Once the treadle is triggered, the doors come down.
- **Leg-hold traps:** These can be very effective, especially when several are used together. There is less to be wary of, as the possums do not enter anything. However, setting and careful placement of traps requires skill and experience..

### Recommended leg-hold trap

**Victor #1:** Strong springs, light, compact, reliable, adjustable tabs/plates. Can be harder to source, and more expensive. Bush Master leg hold traps are also an option.

**Tip:** Use two or more leg-hold traps at one site to make the most of possums' sociability.

### Recommended cage traps

- **Tāwhiti Cage:** A double entrance cage trap with an optional sensor to detect when the trap has triggered and sends out a message.
- **Pestgard Tunnel trap MK2:** A lightweight and durable double entrance cage trap.

**Tip:** Look for cage traps with double-entrances and a treadle to maximise your chances.



## Trap density and grid

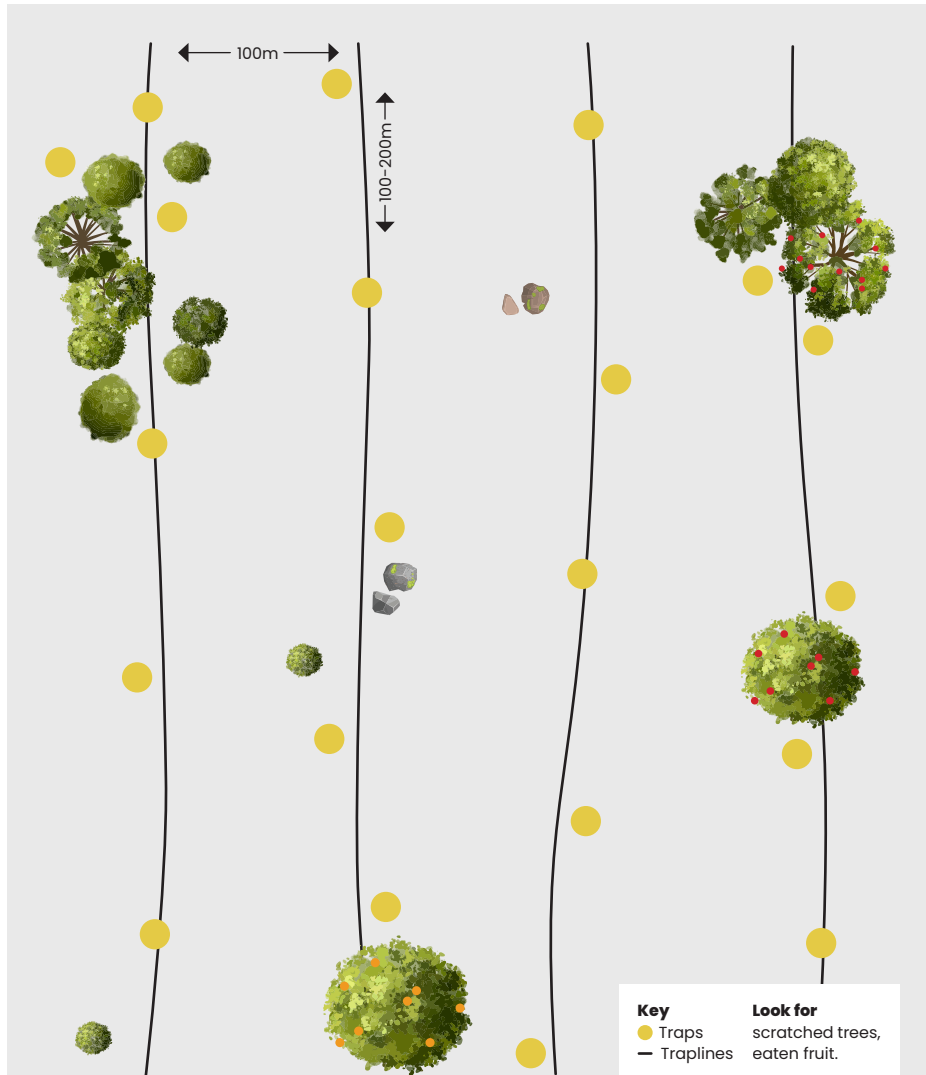
Following exact grid spacing for possum traps is less important than finding the right position based on signs of activity.

The grids below are a guideline, but ensure you move traps around depending on terrain, pest activity, and trap success. Consider the landscape and the fact that possums are visual: in dense forest, traps can be closer together, and in more open areas, traps can be further away.

### Recommended grid

- 100m between traplines
- 100-200m between traps along traplines for kill traps
- 200m between traps is fine if you are using self-resetting traps like AT220s
- If traps are limited, your project area is large, and/or possums are at low density, then set up traplines 300m apart with traps 200m along each trapline. You can expand out to this spacing as the possum population reduces, and use pre-feeding to maximise interest
- When using live capture traps, look for signs of possum activity (scratched trees, pad-runs, eaten fruit) and set up traps at these spots





**Tips:** White backing boards for your traps create a strong visual lure, drawing in possums from farther away.

- CDs and other light reflecting lures or glow-in-the-dark objects hung near traps also create interest.
- When on public land, be aware of safety and traps being in public view.



## Trap location and placement

Good trap placement is key. Test what works and move traps around to find the best spots.

A grid layout is recommended, but it's not a rule. It's worth wandering 10–15 metres off-grid to find the best trap site. Look for:

- Scratch marks on trees which indicate they are regularly visited by possums. Sometimes one side of the tree gets more activity, particularly if the trunk slopes and one side is easier to climb
- Use trees or posts that are dinner-plate sized for ease of climbing
- Existing tracks such as hiking trails or along roads
- 'Pad runs' (worn down track in bush)

## Trap checking frequency

How frequently you check your traps will depend on the population numbers, seasons, and type of trap.

- **Leg-hold and cage traps:** Must be checked daily
- **Kill traps:** Check every 1–2 weeks initially, then reduce as possum numbers fall
- **Self-resetting traps:** Check and reservice every 3 months

## Possum control by shooting

- 🔫 **Shooting:** Night-shooting can be an effective method of reducing possums. Shooting is suitable in rural areas only, and can keep numbers down if done regularly. You'll need access to a skilled shooter with a thermal scope or spotlight. Landowner permission is essential on private land.
- 📄 Permits are also required on public conservation land.
- 🔫 Check firearm license requirements.

### A note on toxins for possums:

Toxins can be highly effective for initial possum knockdowns, with trapping for ongoing control at lower densities. To target possums directly, acute toxins such as Feratox, are required. **Acute toxins require a CSL and are not covered by this guide.** Brodifacoum is also a popular toxin choice for targeting possums. **We recommend particular caution with Brodifacoum** because it can get into the food chain (e.g. through slugs, snails, possums, and pigs), and can cause secondary poisoning to pets and non-target species. DOC restricts its use on the mainland, and MPI is currently reviewing it. In the future, it may require a handler's certificate.

**Possums and rats often coexist** so it may be wise to reduce your rat population before targeting possums with toxins, to maximise your toxin impact on your main target. Possums will consume a lot of rat bait without receiving a lethal dose, so protect your rat toxin from possums (use a reversible possum baffle in Philproof station, or tie in bait blocks). Some rat baits (e.g. Pindone) can actually act as a lure and pre-feed for possum toxins, but it's best to talk to an expert before trying this approach. Contact your regional council, local DOC office or Predator Free New Zealand Trust for a list of contractors.

Your group may be able to partner with a contractor to control possums. For example, you could apply initial rat control with Pindone and then work with a professional contractor with a CSL to apply more potent possum-targeted toxins.

An alternative option to Pindone (for groups that do not have a CSL) is DoubleTap (diphacinone + cholecalciferol), but this has produced mixed results. For further information around toxins for possums, head to [predatorfreenz.org/toolkits](http://predatorfreenz.org/toolkits).

## Notes

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