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KEEP ROOSTING BIRDS FROM DIRTYING CARS AND DRIVEWAYS THIS FALL

In the fall, birds such as grackles and other blackbirds, European starlings and house sparrows, form flocks to feed and roost. When the birds roost in populated areas, the flocks often are a nuisance because they can cause odor, noise, filth and damage to trees, walkways and buildings.

If bird flocks appear to be preparing to roost in a tree during the evening hours, make noise to disturb them and scare them away. The earlier this is done, the more effective it will be. When a flock has roosted in a tree for a long time, it may take three or more consecutive evenings of scaring the birds to get them to leave. Start harassing them when they begin to arrive and continue doing so periodically until dark.

Starlings cause other agricultural damage by eating cultivated fruits such as grapes and cherries. In some areas, they pull sprouting wheat and other grains and eat the planted seed. Starling roosts in rural and urban sites causing health, filth, noise, and odor problems. Their droppings damage and deface equipment and vehicles. In addition, starlings compete for nest sites with native hole-nesting birds such as blue birds, flickers, woodpeckers, and purple martins. You can tell I am not a big fan of starlings, a non-native bird.

On the beneficial side, starlings eat insects and other invertebrate pests such as lawn or pasture grubs. However, this benefit is partially offset by the fact that starlings often take over nest cavities of native insect-eating birds.

Former extension educator Jim Emal of Wilber reports at the Czechland Vineyard, the best trick in the vineyard to decrease bird damage was not exploders or visual devices but a loud recording of hawks and/or eagles. Birds respect those sounds!

For long-term solutions to these problems, eliminate attractive roosting places where bird roosts are occurring. Dense groves of overcrowded young trees provide great roosts, so thin about one-third of the trees to disperse roosting flocks and make the area less appealing as a roost. Thinning the overcrowded trees also will improve the remaining tree stand.

Large trees with thick side branches also give birds a nice place to settle. To remove a roosting flock and discourage it from returning, thin the side branches or have a professional do so. However, be sure to leave the top of the tree intact, both to preserve the quality of the tree and because the side branches will grow back even thicker if the top is thinned.

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