

# Koalas and dogs don't mix

## Introduction

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Koalas have sharp claws and teeth and are capable of defending themselves. However, when a koala finds itself confronted by an aggressive dog in an unfamiliar and confined space such as a residential backyard, then the odds are stacked against it. Most dog attacks on koalas take place in the dog's backyard and often result in serious injury or death for the koala.

The number of reported dog attacks on koalas increases during the koala breeding season, between September and February. This is a busy time, with male koalas more mobile, and young koalas becoming independent and moving away from their mother in search of their own territory. Much of this activity occurs during the evening and overnight.

## Responsible dog ownership

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### Keeping your dog under effective control

Many dog owners may not realise that their dog poses a potential threat to koalas, with even the most obedient dog being capable (and likely) to protect its territory from other animals attempting to enter it, including koalas.

Keeping your dog under effective control will reduce the risk of injury to your dog and the koala. Early evening and hours of darkness are the times when koalas are most active, and the times when koalas may come down to the ground to move between trees. Safe passage for the koala will require keeping your dog inside your house or in an enclosed outdoor area away from the koala. This will also help to prevent your dog from barking at the koala; annoying you and your neighbours!

### A koala friendly property

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Koalas have many hazards and barriers to negotiate in urban areas. To make a fence koala friendly consider leaning a flat timber post or plank against the fence on both sides (e.g. backyard to front yard). This will allow a koala to enter your yard and exit when it is ready to move on. It also means you do not need to keep the gate to your backyard open (especially important from a security perspective and if you have young children or pets).

## Dog attack on a koala – steps to take

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1. Confine your dog away from the injured koala.
2. Contact your local Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) office during business hours.

## Lending a helping hand

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If you are comfortable doing so, you may be asked by the Koala Information Line operator or DENR Duty Ranger to confine the injured koala to prevent it from attempting to climb a tree or move away from your property before help arrives. A large, empty upturned box (with air holes to provide ventilation) or a laundry basket may be used for this purpose, with a weight placed on top to hold it down.

Please do not handle the koala unless directed to do so by the Koala Information Line operator or the DENR Duty Ranger. Do not let children pat or interfere with the koala in any way. Unnecessary handling will place additional stress on the injured koala and could result in injury to the person assisting the koala.

## Fate of injured koalas

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Injured koalas are assessed by the DENR Duty Ranger. The welfare of the koala is the primary focus - the extent of its injuries will be assessed and used to determine subsequent options for treatment. Some koalas can be released immediately after treatment, whereas others may be kept for 24 hours so their injuries can be treated and their health monitored and re-assessed. Sadly, some koalas have to be humanely euthanased due to the extent of their injuries.

Koalas are also highly susceptible to stress; even if they appear to have only minor injuries, many still die from stress related illness.

## Euthanasia of koalas

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Any decision to euthanase a koala is made after careful consideration of the health and welfare of the individual animal and its chances of survival. DENR officers involved in animal euthanasia are professionally trained and treat each animal with care, dignity and respect.