



An Extended Guide · No. 1556

Animals, Livestock, and Critters

Living with wildlife and
stock around a ground array

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

BillsHomeTech.com · (330) 200-8042 · Atwater, Ohio

Free & printable — share it with someone who needs it



Book a visit —
billshometech.com/book

! Read this first — two honest truths about ground-mount solar

Two honest truths before we start, because they surprise a lot of good folks. First, a ground-mounted solar array is a professional job. It takes a licensed installer, real foundation work in your yard, building and electrical permits, and your utility's approval to connect (that approval is called interconnection). This guide is here to help you understand, plan for, and evaluate a ground mount; it is not a do-it-yourself project, and I never want you digging footings, wiring an array, or opening an electrical panel. Second, a plain grid-tied solar system — roof or ground, without a battery — shuts itself off during a power outage, even in bright sunshine. That is a required safety feature, so the system cannot put electricity onto the lines while the crews are repairing them. If keeping the lights on during an outage matters to you, you will need a battery, and we will talk about that plainly. Down at ground level, your array shares the yard with the local wildlife and, out in the country, your livestock — so a little critter-proofing keeps the wiring safe and everyone content.

Sharing the yard with the local critters

A ground array sits right down where the animals live, so from day one it has company — chipmunks, birds, maybe the family dog, and out on acreage the livestock too. The good news is that keeping them from causing trouble is straightforward once you know what to watch for.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. For 30-plus years I've helped folks feel settled about the gear in and around their homes, in plain words and at their own pace. Critters around solar sound worrying, but nearly all of it comes down to a few simple, sensible steps.

The single biggest concern — and I'll say it more than once — is protecting the wiring, because rodents love to gnaw. Everything else, from birds to livestock, is a matter of good habits and a few inexpensive guards. Let's walk through it all calmly.

★ Wondering what's likely around your array?

Tell me where you live and what shares your land, and I'll help you think through the critter-proofing that fits your place. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The whole idea in under a minute

If you read nothing else, read this. Here's living with animals around a ground array, boiled down to the essentials.

- ❑ A ground array sits at critter level, so wildlife will investigate it.
- ❑ The big worry is rodents nesting underneath and chewing the wiring.
- ❑ Simple mesh 'critter guards' around the panels seal them out.
- ❑ Birds like to nest under panels too — bird skirts keep them from moving in.
- ❑ Out in the country, livestock will rub on the frames and posts if allowed.
- ❑ A pole mount lifts the panels up out of reach of stock and drifts alike.
- ❑ Chewed or damaged wiring is always a job for a licensed pro — never you.

✓ Guard the wiring, and you've won most of the battle

If you do just one thing, seal off the space under the panels so rodents can't nest and chew there. That single step heads off the costliest and most common critter problem there is.

Why the wiring is the big worry

Of everything an animal might do around your array, one problem stands head and shoulders above the rest: chewed wiring.

The sheltered, shaded space under a ground array is exactly the sort of cozy, hidden spot rodents love to nest in. Once they've moved in, they gnaw — it's simply what they do to keep their teeth in check — and the wiring running between the panels is right there. A chewed wire can knock out part of your array, and damaged electrical wiring is a genuine hazard, not just an inconvenience.

That's why so much of critter-proofing is really about one thing: keeping animals out from under the panels in the first place. Seal that space, keep the base clear, and you've prevented the problem that causes the most trouble and the biggest repair bills.

! Damaged wiring is a hazard — hands off

If you ever spot chewed, exposed, or hanging wiring under your array, don't touch it and don't try to patch it. Keep people and pets clear and call a licensed professional. Damaged solar wiring can still be live and dangerous.

Rodents and chipmunks underneath

The usual suspects are the small, busy ones — chipmunks, mice, rats, squirrels — and they're drawn to the same thing: shelter.

The gap beneath the panels is dry, shaded, and hidden from hawks and cats, which makes it prime real estate for a nest. Add a little tall grass or a woodpile nearby and you've practically rolled out the welcome mat. Once they settle in, the nesting material and the gnawing both become problems.

The answer is to make that space unwelcoming and unreachable: seal the openings with a proper guard, keep the surrounding growth cut back so there's no cover, and don't store feed, seed, or woodpiles right beside the array. Take away the shelter and the food, and the critters lose interest.

✓ A tidy base is an uninviting base

Rodents want cover. Keeping the ground under and around the array clear — which our mowing-and-vegetation guide covers — makes the whole spot far less tempting before a single guard even goes on.

Critter guards and mesh skirts

The workhorse fix for rodents is a simple barrier that closes off the space beneath the panels. It's inexpensive and it works.

A critter guard — sometimes called a mesh skirt — is a band of sturdy metal mesh clipped around the lower perimeter of the panels, sealing the gap so animals can't get underneath to nest. It's unobtrusive, it doesn't hurt how the array works, and it heads off the chewing problem at the source.

Many installers will fit critter guards as part of the job if you ask, and it's far easier to do at install time than after the fact. If you're in an area thick with chipmunks and squirrels, it's well worth raising before the array goes in.

✓ Ask for guards at install time

Fitting critter guards is simplest while the array is being built. Put it on your question list for the installer — a small line item now can spare you a chewed-wire repair later.

Birds nesting under the panels

Birds see the same sheltered space rodents do, and some are keen to nest there. It's less about chewing and more about mess and blockage.

The underside of a panel makes a tidy little roof, and pigeons and other birds will happily tuck a nest up there. The trouble is the droppings, the nesting debris that can pile up, and the general mess — plus the racket right outside your window in spring.

The fix rhymes with the rodent one: close off the gap. Bird skirts or mesh clipped around the panel edges keep birds from getting underneath to roost, while still letting air move as it should. The same guard often handles birds and rodents together.

✓ One barrier, two problems solved

Because birds and rodents both want the same hidden space under the panels, a good perimeter guard often takes care of both at once. That's a tidy bit of value for a modest add-on.

Wasps, hornets, and other stingers

The sheltered underside of an array can tempt stinging insects to build too, and those deserve a little extra caution.

Wasps and hornets like dry, protected corners, and the framework and junction spots under a ground array can offer just that. A nest there isn't a threat to the system, but it is to you or anyone who goes to work around the panels not expecting company.

So before you settle in to mow, trim, or check the array in warm weather, take a moment to look for nests first. A small, fresh nest may be an easy thing to deal with; a large or established one is a job for a pest professional, not for swatting at yourself.

! Look before you reach under the panels

In wasp season, always glance under and around the array before you put your hands anywhere near it. If you find a sizable nest, back off and call a pest professional — a sting while you're bent over the array is worth avoiding, especially if anyone's allergic.

Livestock rubbing on frames and posts

Out on a farm, the animals are bigger and the concern shifts — from what nests underneath to what leans, rubs, and pushes on the structure.

Cattle and horses are itchy creatures, and a sturdy solar frame makes a fine scratching post in their eyes. Over time, a big animal leaning and rubbing on the frames and posts can loosen hardware, bend components, or worse. It's not malice — it's just a cow being a cow — but the array needs protecting from it.

The two common answers are to keep the stock away from the structure with fencing, or to lift the panels up out of reach entirely on a pole mount. Which suits you depends on your animals and your layout, and a good installer will have seen it before.

✓ Protect the posts, or raise the panels

If livestock share the ground with your array, plan for it from the start — either fence the array off or go with a pole mount that puts the panels above the animals. Retrofitting protection later is always harder.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

The animals you're planning around look very different in a suburban backyard than they do on a working farm — so the critter-proofing does too.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, the cast is smaller: chipmunks and squirrels after that sheltered space, birds looking to nest, and the family dog taking an interest in something new in the yard.

- Chipmunks and squirrels are the main wiring risk — a perimeter guard handles them.
- Bird skirts keep pigeons and their mess out from under the panels.
- A curious or digging dog may need a little fence of its own around the array.
- Keep bird feeders and woodpiles away from the array so you're not inviting guests.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, add the big animals and the deeper wildlife: cattle, horses, and sheep that rub or graze, plus deer, raccoons, and the barn cats who patrol it all.

- Fence stock away from the frames, or lift the panels on a pole mount.
- More wildlife means the perimeter guard against rodents matters even more.
- Barn cats are a quiet help — they keep the rodent population down for you.
- Deer mostly just pass through, but a fence keeps them from bumping the array.

★ Backyard or barnyard, I'll help you plan for it

Whether you're guarding against chipmunks in town or cattle on the back forty, there's a sensible way to protect your array. Tell me your setup and I'll help. Call (330) 200-8042.

Pole mounts lift the panels clear

For homes with livestock, one design solves the rubbing problem outright by simply putting the panels up where the animals can't reach.

A pole mount stands the panels on a single stout post rather than a low frame, raising them well above head height. That lifts them clear of rubbing cattle, keeps the whole works out of a curious animal's reach, and — as a bonus — puts them above deep winter drifts too.

Pole mounts have their trade-offs and their own guide, so I won't go deep here. But if livestock and your array will share ground, it's an option well worth asking your installer about early. Our pole-mount guide lays out where it shines and where it doesn't.

✓ A rural favorite for good reason

Lifting the panels out of reach neatly sidesteps the whole livestock problem. If you farm, ask about a pole mount up front — our pole-mount guide has the full picture.

Deer, dogs, and barn cats

Beyond the nesters and the livestock, a few other familiar animals come up — some a mild concern, one a genuine help.

Deer mostly just wander through and aren't much bothered by an array, though a fence keeps them from bumping it or nibbling any plantings around it. Dogs vary: most ignore the panels, but a digger or a chewer may need a small barrier to keep them from burrowing underneath or worrying at cables.

Barn cats, on the other hand, are an old-fashioned asset. A cat or two patrolling the property keeps the rodent population down naturally, which is exactly the pressure you want off your wiring. Nature's own critter guard, you might say.

✓ Let the barn cat earn its keep

If you've got a good mouser or two about the place, they're quietly doing some of your critter-proofing for you. A low rodent population is the best protection your wiring can have.

Fencing to keep animals away

Sometimes the simplest protection is just a good fence — keeping the bigger animals, and curious kids, at a respectful distance.

A fence around the array serves double duty: it keeps livestock from rubbing on the structure and it keeps children and pets away from live electrical gear. On a farm it may be the difference between a herd that leaves the array alone and one that treats it as a scratching post.

Fencing does need balancing against sun and access — you don't want it shading the panels or making the array a chore to reach. That's really the subject of our security-and-fencing guide, which weighs the choices in full; here, just know a fence is often the tidiest answer for big animals.

✓ A fence guards animals and people alike

The same fence that stops a cow from rubbing on the frame keeps grandchildren and pets away from live equipment. Our security-and-fencing guide covers how to do it without shading or blocking the array.

Spotting critter trouble early

Catching a problem while it's small is the whole game. Here's what to keep half an eye out for as you pass the array.

- Nesting material — grass, leaves, fluff — tucked up under the panels.
- Droppings or a fresh dirt mound right at the base of the frame.
- Gnaw marks on anything, or — the serious one — exposed or chewed wire.
- A wasp or hornet nest building in the framework in warm weather.
- Loose hardware or a leaning post where a big animal has been rubbing.

✓ A glance now and then is plenty

You don't need to inspect daily. A quick look whenever you're out by the array is enough to catch most trouble early — while it's still a small, cheap fix rather than a big one.

What you can check, and what's a pro's job

You can safely handle a good deal of the critter side yourself — but there's a bright line at anything electrical, and it never moves.

You can clear growth, keep feed and woodpiles away, watch for nests, shoo off a wasp scout, and note when something looks amiss. Fitting or checking a mesh guard is usually fine too. All of that is ordinary, sensible homeowner care.

But the moment wiring is involved — a chewed cable, an exposed wire, a connector pulled loose — you stop and call a professional. Don't touch it, don't tape it, don't test it. Our maintenance guide covers the homeowner checks in more detail; the electrical repairs belong to a licensed pro, every time.

! The wiring line is absolute

Watching, clearing, and guarding: yours to do. Anything to do with the actual wiring or electrical gear: a licensed professional's, always. When in doubt, keep clear and make the call — there's no shame in it.

Guarded versus unguarded, side by side

It's worth seeing plainly what a simple perimeter guard buys you, because the difference is bigger than the price of the mesh.

	Unguarded	Guarded
Under panels	Nests move in	Sealed off
Wiring	At risk of chewing	Protected
Birds	Roost and mess	Kept out
Repairs	More likely	Far fewer
Peace of mind	Always wondering	Settled

A guard is a small, one-time add-on that quietly prevents the most common and most expensive critter problems. For most ground arrays, especially in critter-heavy country, it's an easy call.

Making the base uninviting

Guards are the barrier; a clean, open base is what stops critters wanting to be there at all. The two work hand in hand.

Much of the animal trouble around an array starts with cover and food. Tall grass, weeds, brush, woodpiles, and feed or birdseed nearby all say 'come nest here.' Take those away and the array becomes a far less appealing address, guard or no guard.

So keep the growth cut back, don't stack wood or store feed right against the array, and site bird feeders well away from it. Our mowing-and-vegetation guide goes deeper on keeping the ground clear; it turns out a tidy base is quietly one of your best critter defenses.

✓ Take away the shelter and the snacks

Clear growth, no woodpiles, no feed nearby — do those three things and you've removed most of what draws critters in. It's the cheapest protection there is, and it starts working immediately.

When they've already moved in

Suppose critters have beaten you to it and set up house under the panels. Don't panic — here's the calm way to handle it.

First, figure out what you're dealing with and whether any wiring has been touched. If you can see chewed or damaged wire, that part is a pro's call straight away — leave it be and phone a professional. If it's just nesting with no wiring harm yet, the job is to clear them out gently and then seal the space so they can't return.

For a stubborn infestation, or anything involving wasps or a large animal, bring in the right specialist — a pest professional or your installer — rather than wrestling with it yourself. Once it's clear, fitting a proper guard is what keeps the next tenant from moving in.

✓ Clear it out, then seal it up

Evicting critters only sticks if you close the door behind them. Always follow a cleanout with a proper guard — otherwise you'll be doing the same job again next season.

Critter-proofing, step by step

Put it all together and the whole approach is short and sensible. Here's the routine, start to finish.

- ❑ Look the array over for nests, droppings, gnaw marks, and wasp nests.
- ❑ Clear the growth and remove nearby cover, woodpiles, and feed.
- ❑ Fit a perimeter guard to seal the space under the panels.
- ❑ Fence off or raise the array where livestock share the ground.
- ❑ Keep a casual eye out, and call a pro at any sign of chewed wiring.

✓ Do it once, then just keep an eye out

Set up right at the start — guards, a clear base, fencing where needed — and living with animals around your array becomes a matter of the occasional glance. That's the whole job.

Common slip-ups to sidestep

A handful of avoidable missteps cause most of the critter trouble I hear about. Knowing them ahead of time saves the grief.

- Skipping a perimeter guard and hoping the critters won't find the space.
- Letting grass and brush grow up around the array and roll out the welcome mat.
- Storing feed, birdseed, or a woodpile right up against the frame.
- Letting livestock share the ground with no fence or pole to protect the array.
- Poking at chewed wiring yourself instead of calling a licensed pro.

✓ Nearly all of it is preventable

Almost every critter problem traces back to shelter, food, or an unguarded gap. Close those off from the start and you'll rarely think about the animals again — except maybe to thank the barn cat.

Questions worth asking up front

A few questions at planning time make the critter side far easier to manage. Bring these to your installer.

Q: Do you fit critter guards or mesh skirts as part of the install?

Many installers offer them, and it's much simpler to do while the array is being built than to add later. If your area is thick with chipmunks and squirrels, it's worth requesting up front.

Q: We have livestock — how would you keep them off the array?

A good installer will suggest fencing the array off or lifting the panels on a pole mount, and can talk through which suits your animals and your layout best.

Q: How is the wiring protected and routed under the panels?

You want to hear that cables are secured and shielded, not left dangling where a rodent can reach them. Thoughtful wire management is a sign of a careful installer.

✓ Plan the protection with the panels

The easiest time to critter-proof is before the array exists. Raise guards, fencing, and wire routing while you're choosing an installer — a little foresight saves a lot of bother.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about animals, livestock, and critters around a ground array.

Q: Will animals really damage my solar panels?

The panels themselves are tough — the real risk is critters getting underneath to nest and chew the wiring. That's why sealing off the space with a simple guard is the heart of critter-proofing.

Q: What is a critter guard, exactly?

It's a band of sturdy mesh clipped around the lower edge of the panels, sealing the gap so rodents and birds can't get underneath to nest. It's inexpensive, unobtrusive, and the single best protection for your wiring.

Q: Can I keep livestock near my ground array?

Yes, with planning. Either fence the animals away from the frame or use a pole mount that lifts the panels out of reach. Left unprotected, big animals will rub on the structure and loosen it over time.

Q: I found chewed wiring — what should I do?

Leave it alone and call a licensed professional. Keep people and pets clear of it in the meantime. Damaged solar wiring can still be live, so it's never something to poke at or patch yourself.

★ Not sure what's nesting or roaming out there?

There's no silly question when it comes to keeping your array — and your wiring — safe from the local wildlife. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll talk it through.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made living with animals and critters around your array feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't sell solar and I don't do the licensed electrical work or the install itself — I help you understand it all, ask the right questions, and line up a trustworthy local solar installer, so you never feel talked into anything.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Critter and the Fix

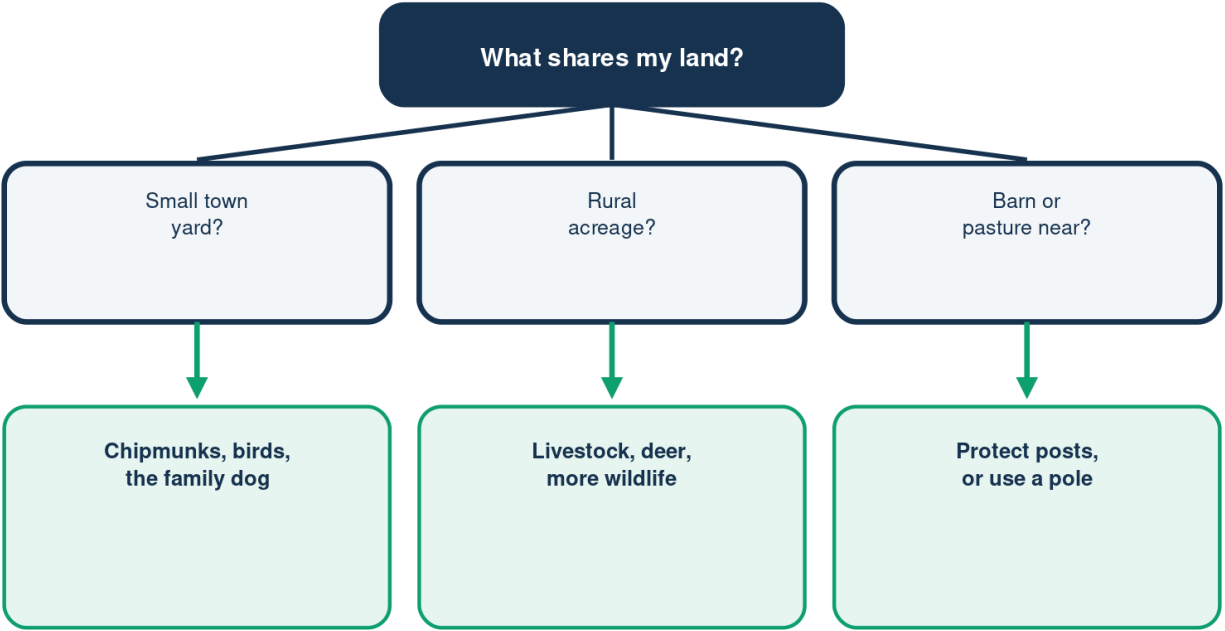
Who comes calling, and how you keep them from causing trouble

	The worry	The fix
Rodents	Chewed wiring	Critter guard
Birds	Nests and mess	Bird skirts
Wasps	Stings	Remove nests
Livestock	Rubbing posts	Fence or pole
Deer/dogs	Bumping, digging	A fence

Sealing the space under the panels heads off the costliest trouble.

What's Around My Array?

Who you plan for depends on where you live



Chewed wiring is always a pro's job – never touch a damaged wire.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Guarded vs Unguarded

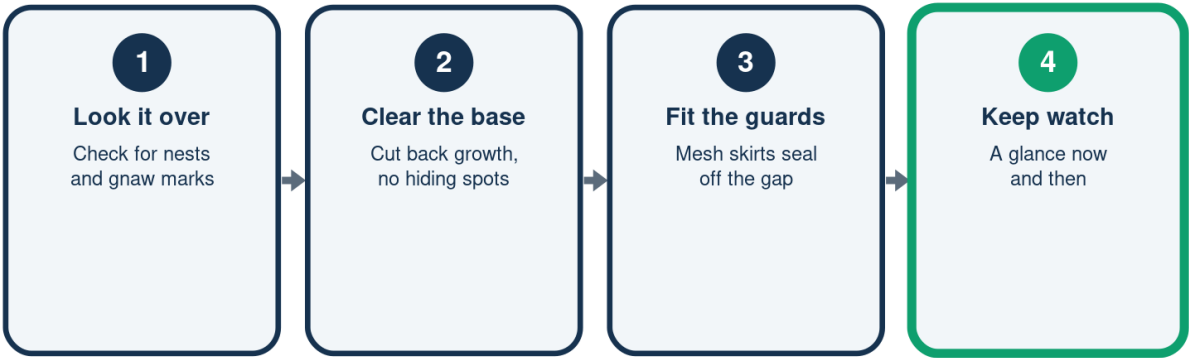
What a simple perimeter guard buys you

	Unguarded	Guarded
Under panels	Nests move in	Sealed off
The wiring	At risk	Protected
Birds	Roost, mess	Kept out
Peace of mind	Wondering	Settled

A small one-time add-on that prevents the most common problems.

Critter-Proofing

A short, sensible routine, start to finish



Do it once at the start, then just keep a casual eye out.



Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.
You just have to remember you can call.
Friendly, in-home tech help -- I come to you.

BILL'S PROMISE

If you are not 100% happy with a visit, I will
make it right -- or refund it. No awkwardness,
no fine print. That is how I would want to be treated.

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM

— Bill

Prefer help without a visit?

Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



Book a visit —
billshometech.com/book

Use of these guides is subject to our Terms of Use (billshometech.com/terms-of-use).

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM

For general information only — not professional advice. Use at your own risk. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech