



An Extended Guide · No. 1532

Keeping Critters Out From Under Your Panels

Squirrels, birds, and
the guards that stop them

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! Read this first — this is professional, on-the-roof work

Putting solar on a roof is expert, permitted work — not a weekend project. It means drilling into your roof and sealing every hole against water for decades, or setting heavy ballast your roof has to carry, all while working at a height where a fall can be deadly and around wiring that is live whenever the sun is up. This guide is here to help you understand and judge that work — so you can hire the right people and ask good questions — not to walk you up a ladder to do it yourself. For any roof-mounted system, use a licensed, insured, properly credentialed solar installer, make sure the required permit and inspection actually happen, and protect your roof's warranty before the first hole is drilled. And please don't climb up to inspect or adjust anything yourself — the roof is their job, not yours. Here we're talking about the small gap beneath your panels and the wildlife it can attract — and why checking on or cleaning up after a critter is still a job for a professional, never a reason to grab a ladder yourself.

The gap under your panels has visitors

It's one of the most common calls I get about existing solar systems: a homeowner hears noises overhead, or notices a mess below the eaves, and wonders what's going on up there.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. The answer, more often than not, is wildlife — squirrels, chipmunks, or birds that have found the small gap under your panels to be a pretty appealing spot to nest. It's a genuinely common situation, and almost always a straightforward one to sort out once you understand what's going on.

This guide explains why that gap is so inviting, what a critter guard is and how it helps, and how to handle it if you already have an uninvited guest — calmly, humanely, and without you ever needing to climb up and look yourself.

★ A common, very fixable problem

This is one of the more relatable solar issues I help with — and one of the easier ones to solve well. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 anytime.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only a few things about critters and your panels, make it these.

- ❑ The small air gap under roof-mounted panels is an appealing, sheltered spot for squirrels, chipmunks, and especially birds and pigeons to nest.
- ❑ Uninvited guests can mean droppings, chewed wiring, noise, and a general mess — more of a nuisance than most homeowners expect.
- ❑ A critter guard — a mesh or metal barrier clipped around the array's edge — keeps wildlife out while leaving the gap free to breathe and drain.
- ❑ A guard can be added when panels are first installed, or fitted onto an existing array later. Neither timing is wrong.
- ❑ Trimming back overhanging branches removes one of the easiest routes wildlife uses to reach your roof in the first place.
- ❑ If you already have a guest, cleaning up or removing a nest is a professional job — never something to climb up and handle yourself.
- ❑ None of this reflects poorly on your installer or your system — it's simply a natural side effect of a gap that's doing its job well.

✓ Read it in any order

Jump to the part that matches your situation — whether you're planning ahead or dealing with a current visitor.

Why that little gap is so inviting

It helps to understand why this happens in the first place — it's simply a side effect of how racking works.

As our guide on how roof racking works explains, panels sit a few inches above the roof surface on purpose — that air gap helps with cooling and drainage. It's a good design feature for the solar system.

The trouble is, from a squirrel's or a bird's point of view, that same gap looks like a sheltered little cave: dry, shaded, elevated, and mostly out of reach of anything that might bother them. It's an accidental invitation, not a flaw in the system.

✓ Not a design mistake

The air gap is doing exactly what it's supposed to do for your solar system. Wildlife interest is simply a natural side effect worth planning for, not a sign something was done wrong.

Who tends to move in

A few familiar neighbors are the most common visitors — none of them malicious, all of them a hassle.

Squirrels and chipmunks

Drawn to a dry, sheltered, elevated spot, and sometimes to the insulation-like feel of the space, for nesting or storing food. They're agile and persistent, and quite comfortable working around panel edges and clamps to get where they want to go.

Birds — especially pigeons

Birds, and pigeons in particular, are frequent visitors under panels. The gap offers shelter from weather and predators, which makes it an easy choice for a nest. Once a pair settles in, they often return to the very same spot season after season unless something about it changes.

✓ No villains here

None of these animals are doing anything wrong by their own instincts — they've just found a comfortable spot. The goal is simply to make that spot less appealing, humanely.

What they tend to leave behind

The nuisance isn't the animal itself so much as what comes with it.

- **Droppings.** Under the array and sometimes staining the roof or siding below — unpleasant and something you'd rather not clean up yourself.
- **Chewed wiring.** Squirrels and chipmunks especially are known chewers, and wiring under the panels is well within reach.
- **Noise.** Scratching, scurrying, or cooing overhead, especially noticeable in early morning or evening.
- **General mess.** Nesting material, debris, and clutter that can build up in the gap over time.
- **Repeat visits.** A spot that's worked once tends to attract more of the same, sometimes season after season, until something changes.

! Chewed wiring is the one to take seriously

Beyond the mess and noise, chewed wiring under an array is a real concern worth acting on — not something to leave alone and hope goes away.

Why chewed wiring is worth taking seriously

Of everything a critter can leave behind, this is the one that goes beyond a mere nuisance.

Wiring under your panels is part of an electrical system, and damaged insulation or exposed wiring is a legitimate safety and reliability concern — not just an inconvenience. It's also the kind of thing that's easy to miss from the ground.

If you notice a production drop on your system's monitoring, or simply suspect wildlife has been active up there, it's worth having it looked at sooner rather than later — by your installer, not by you. Catching it early usually means a simpler, smaller fix.

! This is still rooftop electrical work

Even a wildlife problem under solar panels involves rooftop access and electrical equipment. Please leave inspection and repair to a professional, every time.

What a critter guard actually is

The good news: this is a well-understood problem with a simple, well-established solution.

A **critter guard** is a mesh or metal barrier clipped around the perimeter of the array — essentially fencing off the open edge of that gap while still leaving it able to breathe and drain the way it's meant to.

It doesn't change how your solar system works. It simply closes off the easy access point that made the space appealing to wildlife in the first place, without sealing up the gap itself. It's a modest, low-profile addition, not a major undertaking.

✓ Simple, proven, and unobtrusive

A well-installed critter guard is easy to overlook once it's in place — which is exactly the point. It should solve the problem quietly, not draw attention to itself.

Added at install, or fitted on later

There's no wrong time to add a critter guard — just two different, equally valid paths to get there.

Some homeowners choose to add a guard as part of the original installation, especially if they know their property attracts a lot of wildlife, or simply want to get ahead of the issue from day one.

Just as often, a guard is added later, after an existing array has already had a run-in with a nest or two. That's a completely normal, retrofit-friendly fix — it doesn't mean anything was done wrong the first time around.

★ Either way, it's a straightforward add

Whether you're planning ahead or reacting to a current guest, adding a guard is a modest, sensible step. I'm glad to help you think through timing. (330) 200-8042.

Trees, branches, and keeping the invitation down

A critter guard handles the roof itself. The route wildlife takes to get there is worth a look too.

Overhanging branches are a common highway for squirrels and birds to reach a roof without ever touching the ground. Keeping nearby branches trimmed back removes one of the easiest paths onto your roof and toward your panels.

This is also generally good practice for the roof itself, shade and debris from overhanging limbs being a separate concern of their own. A tree-trimming professional can typically handle this without involving your solar system at all, and it's worth pointing out your panels so they can work around them thoughtfully.

✓ A simple habit that helps year-round

You don't need to remove trees you love — just keep branches that reach toward the roofline trimmed back. It's a small habit that pays off.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

What tends to move in under your panels often depends on where you live and what kind of roof it's on.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town and the suburbs, the most persistent visitor tends to be pigeons, drawn to the shelter of the gap and often already used to living close to people. Squirrels are common too, especially where mature trees overhang a roofline.

- Pigeons in particular are a frequent, persistent visitor in town, and can return to a good spot repeatedly if it isn't guarded.
- Mature suburban trees close to the house make it easy for squirrels to reach the roof without a critter guard in place.
- Droppings and mess are often more noticeable in town, where patios, walkways, and neighbors are closer by.
- A guard added early is a simple, low-drama fix before a recurring pigeon problem sets in.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, a wider range of wildlife is generally around, and a big barn or pole-building roof — often with more open eaves and less human activity nearby — can be just as appealing to critters as the house roof.

- More wildlife diversity in a rural setting means barns and outbuildings are worth the same critter-guard conversation as the house roof.
- A quieter, less-trafficked barn roof can be an especially attractive, undisturbed nesting spot if left unguarded.
- Chewed wiring under a barn array deserves the same prompt, professional attention as it would on the house — distance doesn't make it less important.
- If outbuildings support a well pump or other equipment, keeping that wiring intact matters even more.

★ **Whichever roof it's on, it's worth guarding**

Tell me about your property and what you're noticing, and I'll help you figure out the right next step. Call (330) 200-8042.

Signs you might have a guest

You can catch most of this from ground level — no ladder required, and none recommended.

Watch and listen for noise overhead (scratching, scurrying, or cooing), droppings on the ground or staining below the array, nesting material poking out from under a panel edge, or a production dip your system's monitoring shows. Our common problems guide covers these ground-level signs more broadly.

None of these need an on-the-spot decision from you. Noticing them and making a call is the whole job — the actual look, and any cleanup, belongs to a professional.

✓ Trust your ears as much as your eyes

Noise is often the first clue homeowners notice, especially early in the morning. It's a perfectly good reason to make a call.

Why this still isn't a climb-up-and-look job

It's tempting to think a critter problem is a small enough task to handle yourself. Please resist that instinct.

Even a seemingly minor wildlife issue means going onto a roof with panels, wiring, and racking — the same fall risk and electrical concerns that apply to any other rooftop solar work. The size of the problem doesn't change the size of the risk.

It's also easy to underestimate what you're dealing with from the ground — a nest can be more established, or the wildlife more defensive, than it appears from below.

! Small problem, same rooftop risk

A critter under your panels is not worth a fall. Leave the roof to someone trained and equipped for it, every time.

Humane removal is a professional's job

When there's already a nest or an active visitor, the right approach is calm, humane, and handled by someone qualified.

A wildlife or pest professional, or your solar installer, can assess the situation and handle removal humanely and without harsh chemicals. There's rarely a need for anything drastic — most situations are resolved calmly once someone qualified takes a look.

This is also a good moment to have a critter guard installed or repaired, so the same spot doesn't attract a repeat visitor once it's cleared. Timing can matter too, depending on the season and the animal involved, which is one more reason to let someone experienced take the lead.

★ I can help you find the right person

Whether it's a wildlife specialist or your solar installer who should handle it, I'm glad to help you figure out who to call. (330) 200-8042.

Choosing a critter guard

You don't need to become a materials expert. A few plain questions cover what matters.

- **Does it fully enclose the perimeter?** Gaps left open defeat the purpose — ask how the whole edge is covered.
- **Does it still allow airflow and drainage?** A good guard keeps critters out without undoing the air gap's actual job.
- **Is it a durable, weather-resistant material?** It should hold up outdoors for years without regular attention.
- **Who installs it, and does it affect your roof warranty?** A qualified installer can confirm it won't create a problem for your roof's warranty.

✓ Simple is usually right

This isn't a place that needs a complicated solution. A well-fitted, properly installed guard is typically all it takes.

Retrofitting an existing array

If your panels are already up, adding a guard afterward is a normal, manageable project — not a big undertaking.

Your installer, or another qualified professional familiar with roof-mounted solar, can fit a guard around your existing array's perimeter without disturbing the panels or racking themselves. It's a modest add-on, not a re-install.

If you're not sure who originally installed your system, or they're no longer available, this is a very reasonable project to bring to a new, qualified installer — it doesn't require the original company. A quick description and a photo or two is usually enough to get a straightforward quote.

★ A good project to line up

This is exactly the kind of small, well-defined project I help homeowners find the right person for. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Maintenance and keeping critters from coming back

A guard does most of the work, but a little ongoing attention helps too.

Our guide on cleaning, maintenance, and safe roof access covers general upkeep — occasional professional checks and ground-level monitoring are really all a roof-mount system needs, and critter guards fit right into that same light-touch routine.

Keeping branches trimmed, watching for any gaps or damage to an existing guard, and noting anything unusual you see or hear from the ground are all reasonable homeowner habits — with any actual fix still left to a professional. A quick look from the yard now and then is really all it takes.

✓ Low-maintenance, not no-maintenance

A critter guard is a 'set it and mostly forget it' fix, not a 'never think about it again' one. A little ongoing attention goes a long way.

Common visitors, at a glance

A simple reference for the conversation with your installer or a wildlife professional.

Visitor	What they tend to do
Squirrels and chipmunks	Chew wiring and materials, nest, store food
Birds, especially pigeons	Nest, leave droppings, add noise and mess

✓ **Same solution either way**

A properly fitted critter guard addresses both categories of visitor at once — no need for a different fix per animal.

Questions worth asking

Whether you're planning ahead or dealing with a current visitor, these are good places to start.

Q: Should I add a critter guard when my panels are installed?

It's a reasonable, low-cost-of-mind step to ask about at install, especially if your property has a lot of trees or nearby wildlife.

Q: Can a guard be added to my existing array?

Yes, in most cases — it's a common retrofit that doesn't require removing your panels.

Q: I think I hear something under my panels. What do I do?

Call your installer or a wildlife professional and describe what you're noticing. Don't go up and look yourself.

Q: Will a guard hurt the airflow my panels need?

A properly designed guard is built to keep the gap breathing and draining normally while still keeping wildlife out.

Q: Does adding a critter guard require a permit?

Typically not, since it's a simple exterior accessory rather than a structural or electrical change — but if you're ever unsure, your installer can confirm what your local code expects.

★ Bring your questions to me

Not sure who to call for a critter issue versus a solar issue? I'm glad to help you sort that out. (330) 200-8042.

Why prevention beats cleanup

Of everything in this guide, this is the one idea worth carrying forward.

A critter guard installed before there's ever a problem is a small, quiet fix. Dealing with an established nest, damaged wiring, and a mess to clean up after the fact is a bigger, more involved job — for a professional, not for you, but bigger all the same.

If you're planning a new system, ask about a guard up front. If you already have panels and haven't had an issue yet, it's still worth asking — prevention is easier before there's ever a guest to remove. A short conversation now can save a much longer one later.

! Don't wait for chewed wiring to act

If you already suspect wildlife activity, don't wait for a bigger problem to develop. A call now is easier than a repair later.

Common Questions

The questions about critters and solar panels I hear most often, answered plainly.

Q: Do all roof-mounted solar systems need a critter guard?

Not strictly, but most benefit from one. If your property has trees, nearby wildlife, or you've already had an issue, it's a sensible addition.

Q: Are critter guards harmful to the animals?

No. A good guard simply blocks access to the space — it doesn't harm wildlife, and any removal of an existing nest should be done humanely by a qualified professional.

Q: Can I install a critter guard myself?

Please don't. It still means being on the roof around panels and wiring — hire it out to your installer or a qualified professional.

Q: Will pigeons or squirrels damage my panels themselves?

The panels themselves are pretty tough. The real risk is to wiring and the mess left behind underneath, which is exactly what a guard prevents.

Q: How do I know if my existing system already has a guard?

Ask your installer, or look at the edge of the array from a safe distance — a guard is usually visible as a trim or mesh around the perimeter.

★ Still have a question I didn't cover?

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and ask — there's no such thing as a silly question about your own home.

Bringing it all together

A gap that's good for your panels can also be good for a squirrel or a pigeon — and now you know what to do about it.

The air gap under your panels helps them run cooler and drain well, but it can also invite wildlife looking for shelter. A critter guard, added at install or fitted on later, closes off that invitation without undoing the gap's real job.

If you already have a guest, the approach stays the same as everything else in this roof-mount series: notice it from the ground, call a professional, and let your installer's workmanship warranty and expertise do the rest. Never climb up yourself.

★ Let's keep your roof critter-free

Whether you're planning a new system or dealing with a current visitor, I'm glad to help you think it through — no sales pressure, ever. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

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 keeping critters and birds out from under your solar panels 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 climb on roofs or do the licensed solar, roofing, or electrical work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy, properly credentialed local pro.

★ 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

From Open Gap to Guarded Array

How a critter guard fits into the picture



Works whether added at install or fitted on later.

Common Uninvited Guests

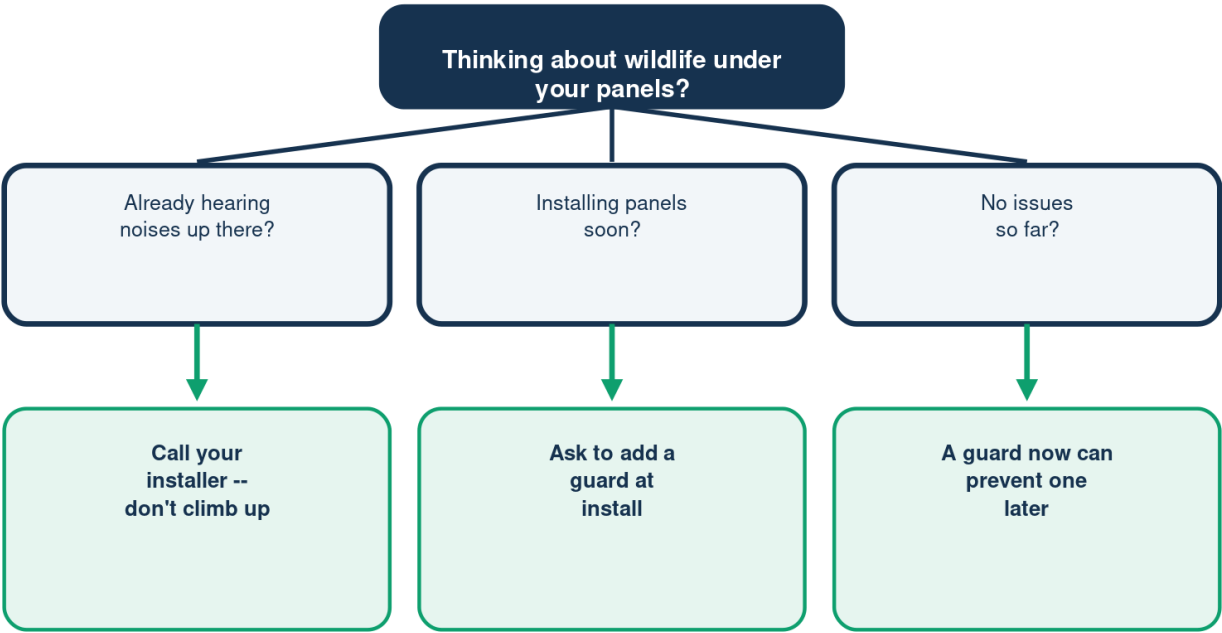
Two familiar visitors, two sets of concerns

What they tend to do	
Squirrels & chipmunks	Chew wiring, nest, store food
Birds & pigeons	Nest, droppings, noise

A properly fitted guard addresses both at once.

Do You Need a Critter Guard?

Three honest starting points



Removal or cleanup is always a professional's job.

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

Guard at Install vs. Retrofit

Two valid timings, same good outcome

What to know	
At install	Easiest, built into the plan
Retrofit later	Just as effective, a modest add-on

Neither timing means something was done wrong.



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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*



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