

Empowering Home Owners to Control Coqui Frogs

Submitted by

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Homeowners want to know how to deal with the frogs in their backyards. They may not be able to stop the coqui in our valleys but they may be able to stop them where it counts for them: on their properties. The most important elements in fighting the frogs are **environment modification** and **good sanitation**.

Eliminate Frog Habitat

Get rid of places where frogs can hide, and allow air and sunshine to dry up moisture. Coincidentally, the same kind of environment favorable to the frog seems to also harbor African snails and slugs.

Plant selection and sanitation

Coqui frogs seem to favor certain plants, such as heliconia, bananas, false stag horn fern (uluhe), wild orchid, ginger, wedelia (small yellow daisy-like flower), and tall grasses. Old banana and heliconia leaves should be removed because they create shade and collect moisture. Frogs prefer to perch where the leaves connect to the trunk.

Trees do not pose as great a problem as the accompanying underbrush does. Start with getting rid of ALL undergrowth and ground cover. Merely cutting them back will still leave sufficient material to provide shade, moisture and lots of hiding spaces. It may take several consecutive cuttings or applications of a weed killer to remove this undergrowth completely.

Trees, such as mangos, avocado and lichee, should be pruned to allow sunshine and air to eliminate moist hiding places. Trim smaller trees or large shrubs to remove the lower branches. Remove the young shoots growing from areca palms to eliminate another favored hiding spot. Pruning will also facilitate spraying at ground level.

Making the coqui frog unwelcome by constant interruption can also work. A neighbor has a mango tree that always has a thick layer of leaves under it. By throwing out a heavy layer of feed, the birds and chickens will totally turn the area upside down and I've seen the chickens catch and eat the coqui. But first the chickens must be introduced to this food source. You may have to catch a couple of coqui (make sure you kill them) and add them to your chicken's feed. Once familiar with the coqui, the chickens will eat it should they scratch one up. Better yet, rake and remove fallen leaves.

Inspect your potted plants

Pots and trays should be individually examined. A frog can easily get into the middle of a stack and lay its eggs. This is especially important if the pots or trays are on the ground, but empty

pots on a bench are not exempt. They, too, should have at least an initial inspection. Cement blocks also provide cool, moist refuge sites. Inspect any building material stacked in the same place for an extended period.

Instead of placing potted plants directly on the ground, lay down a weed barrier cloth. It will make it easier to clean up the debris from your plants by hosing or sweeping. Occasionally, pick up each pot and give a quick spray of citric acid under it. This is especially effective for the very tiny greenhouse frog.

Using something like insecticidal soap on a regular basis can help to chase a frog from your potted plants. It doesn't kill the frog but seems to irritate it enough to cause it to jump out into the open for capture or spraying.

Yards, lawns and green waste

Areas containing rocks that are an inch or bigger should be filled in with fine cinder to eliminate areas the frogs can burrow into.

Keep your lawn trimmed on a regular basis. Better yet if your mower is also a mulcher. It is legal to have a firebreak between your property and a vacant lot. If the lot is frog-infested, and if you can afford it, hire a bulldozer to cut a line, otherwise consider hand clearing. It will give you a buffer area between your property and the frogs. You will have to maintain the firebreak area and not allow the thick, high growth back.

After trimming vegetation, you may find you have a large pile of green waste to deal with. If left untreated, it will attract African snails, slugs and possibly coqui. If you are unable to take it to a transfer station, put it in a pile and apply hydrated lime to the top of the pile. You may have to reapply from time to time when all traces of the lime is gone, especially after rain or when you turn it over and see slugs or snails. This will facilitate breakdown of the green waste into very good compost. Coqui-infested green waste should never be dumped on vacant lots or roadways, and should be mulched before transporting to the rubbish dump.

Spraying your property

For the home gardener, a one-gallon size sprayer or a small backpack sprayer is essential. They are easy to carry.

If you will be using the same sprayer for both citric acid and hydrated lime applications, be careful to rinse out the sprayer, nozzles, hoses, and wand thoroughly between mixing solutions of citric acid and suspensions of hydrated lime to prevent neutralizing and unintentionally rendering the chemicals ineffective.

Hydrated lime needs to be constantly mixed – you can use a special sprayer with an agitator, or you will need to constantly shake your sprayer before and during application. Otherwise the lime will settle at the bottom of the sprayer.

If you prefer to use citric acid, you can spray around plants in the daytime. Most of our plants here are acid-loving and the citric acid will not harm them when used at their base but may burn the leaves of sensitive plants (test by spraying a small portion of a plant and observe a few days for burning before applying citric acid to a large number of plants). Citric acid you can be premixed and ready to go at anytime. The mixture will not spoil. It is just as effective a week or two later as it is on the first day of mixing.

Follow up with vigilance

Coqui frogs are very adaptable, changing their behavior to suit their surroundings and to ensure their survival. Although infrequent, coqui frogs have been seen moving about at times other than in the early evening and at dawn. Their eggs can be found on the ground as well as on vegetation...even a coconut tree is not too high for a nest. We can only gain ground with continued **determination and perseverance**.

After initial treatment, follow up by listening for calling males. Subsequent sprays may be needed for frogs that were missed (females, juveniles, recently-hatched froglets, those that sought shelter from direct contact with the spray either). If there were eggs or juveniles that did not come in contact with either citric acid or hydrated lime, there could be another batch of calling males in about six to eight months, and a follow-up spray application must be done.