

# Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION  
OHIO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH  
AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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**Notes:** From "A Case of Unhindered Growth of the Incisor Teeth of the Woodchuck," *Ohio Journal of Science*, 1922; "An Odd Malformation in a Woodchuck," *Journal of Mammalogy*, 1923; "A Remarkable Woodchuck Skull," *Journal of Mammalogy*, 1930; and "Two Unusual Woodchuck Skulls," *American Midland Naturalist*, 1934. Find good chuck facts at, among others, Canada's nice "Hinterland Who's Who" Web site, <http://www.hww.ca/>. What to do about wayward whistlepigs? Read Ohio State University Extension's "Dealing with Nuisance Woodchucks" fact sheet, <http://ohioline.osu.edu/w-fact/0008.html>. Props to Arnold Drummond!

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## Q. Dear Twig: Woodchucks? Needing braces? Of what might you be talking, Twiggis?

A. Last week, as I was digging up dirt on **woodchucks chucking**, I found a weird report. Then, too, three more like it. Cases where a bad-luck chuck could neither chuck nor chew its chow, or could but chomped with little cheer, because of unchecked growth of its choppers.

That is, the chuckies in the weird reports had way long curved front teeth: teeth that looked like **walrus tusks** or **elephant tusks** or maybe even **bighorn horns**, though not as big or as long.

Reason? The teeth were **incisors**. They never stopped growing. In fact that's normal for a rodent's incisors. (The woodchuck's a rodent.)

But normally, too, these teeth grind together.

They do it when the animal chews. They wear each other down that way. They stay the proper length that way.

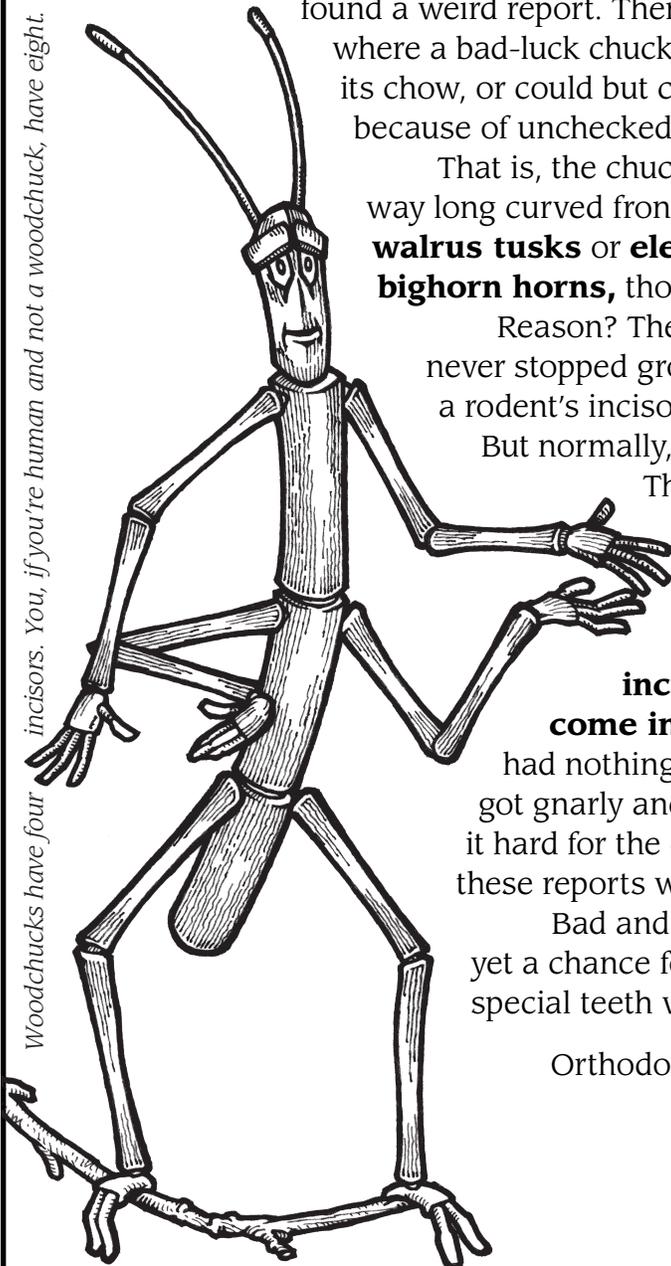
Here, however, **an incisor or two had busted or come in crooked**. The other incisors had nothing to grind on. They grew and got gnarly and never wore down. They made it hard for the chucks to eat. Alas, the guys in these reports were found either puny or dead.

Bad and sad for them, I know. But yet a chance for us to see just how their special teeth work, or should.

Orthodontically,

Twig

Woodchucks have four incisors. You, if you're human and not a woodchuck, have eight.



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