North Carolina Squatters Rights: Adverse Possession and Removing Occupants

Summary for landlords and property managers. Last reviewed October 29, 2026. Full guide: https://www.generationadvisory.com/laws/north-carolina-squatters-rights

North Carolina requires twenty years of possession for adverse possession, or seven years under color of title. Owners generally remove unauthorized occupants through the courts or, for recent entries, as trespass.

Key points

- Adverse possession requires twenty years of possession under known and visible boundaries.
- A claimant holding a document that appears to give title can win after seven years of possession under known and visible boundaries.
- Owners generally remove unauthorized occupants through a court case, though police may treat a recent entry without permission as trespass.

North Carolina at a glance

Rule	North Carolina	Law
Adverse possession period	Adverse possession requires twenty years of possession under known and visible boundaries.	N.C. General Statutes section 1-40
Claim under a document (color of title)	A claimant holding a document that appears to give title can win after seven years of possession under known and visible boundaries.	N.C. General Statutes section 1-38
How owners remove occupants	Owners generally remove unauthorized occupants through a court case, though police may treat a recent entry without permission as trespass.	N.C. General Statutes (trespass and summary ejectment)

Mistakes to avoid

- Waiting months to act after someone moves in.
- Changing locks or removing belongings yourself.
- Accepting rent or utility payments from the occupant.
- Leaving a vacant property unchecked for long stretches.

Verify current law

Laws named in this summary:

- N.C. General Statutes section 1-40
- N.C. General Statutes section 1-38
- N.C. General Statutes (trespass and summary ejectment)
- N.C. General Statutes sections 42-26 to 42-36 and Chapter 7A
- N.C. General Statutes sections 42-25.6 to 42-25.9

Official sources:

- North Carolina General Assembly: General Statutes: https://www.ncleg.gov/Laws/GeneralStatutes
- North Carolina Judicial Branch: https://www.nccourts.gov/

> General information, not legal advice. Check current law and talk to a North Carolina attorney before you act. Last reviewed October 29, 2026.