



RABBITS

Host Plants

Annuals, perennials, vegetables and bulbs, as well as many trees and shrubs are vulnerable to rabbit damage. Favorite flowers include tulips, lilies and pansies. Young trees and trees with smooth bark are particularly at risk, as are members of the rose family, including apple trees, raspberries, blackberries, and, of course, roses. Rabbits also like strawberries, peas, beans, carrots, lettuce and beets, grasses and weeds, as well as a great many other plants too numerous to mention. When other food sources are scarce, rabbits may attack nearly any ornamental or vegetable crop.

Plant Damage/Symptoms

In winter, tracks are easy to identify. Rabbits will stand on snow to reach higher areas, and damage can occur as much as two feet above snow level. Bark is a favorite winter food; young trees may be stripped of bark and older trees may be girdled. Older growth will be gnawed on and young stems will be clipped off cleanly. Look for rabbit pellets as a sure sign of their activity in the area.

In the spring, rabbits turn their attention to tender young plants and bulbs, often nipping them down to soil level.

Controls

Remove brush piles, weedy areas and debris where rabbits live and hide. Avoid planting their favorite foods or interplant with other, less tasty or repellent plants. For example, plant tulips (a favorite) with fritillaria, a bulb which rodents find distasteful. Garlic and onions can be planted among vegetables in the same way.

Protect susceptible trees from winter damage with hardware cloth or window screening placed around the trunk to the height of three feet from the ground or two feet above the expected snow line. Make sure the screening stands at least one to two inches out from the trunk so the rabbits cannot eat through the holes.

The best protection for the garden is a fence. This can be a simple chicken wire fence standing two feet tall. The bottom of the fence should be buried several inches and the mesh should be one inch or smaller to ensure that young rabbits cannot get through it. For a less visible option, purchase metal fencing coated with green plastic to blend in with the plants. A more permanent fence of welded wire or chain link can also be used.

Temporary cages may be constructed for individual plants or rows in the vegetable or flower

garden. These can be made of chicken wire or hardware cloth stapled to scrap lumber. Sink the cages two to three inches into the soil to prevent the rabbits from burrowing under them. These cages can be removed as the young plants grow and become less of a temptation to the rabbits.

Repellants, both commercial and homemade, are commonly used for rabbits. Ground hot peppers, talcum powder, wood ashes, crushed limestone, blood meal and hair, either human or animal, have all been tried with varying levels of success. Some customers have reported Liquid Fence to be quite effective. All repellants, whether commercial or homemade, will need to be reapplied frequently, especially during rainy weather.

Trapping and removing rabbits or other animals is not recommended as it is not very effective and it is not legal without a permit.