

## **Controlling Rabbits**

*Taken from the Michigan State University Cooperative Extension website*

### **General Description**

Habitat - Most species prefer open, brushy, or cultivated areas, but some frequent marshes, swamps or deserts. They tend to concentrate in favorable areas such as brushy fence rows or field edges, gullies filled with debris, brush piles or landscaped yards where food and cover are suitable. They typically spend their lives within a 10 acre area.

Diet - Rabbits eat a wide variety of plants; from flowers and vegetables in the spring and summer to woody plants in fall and winter.

Reproduction - Rabbits live from 12 to 15 months, producing 2 to 3 litters per year with 5 to 6 young per litter. The gestation period is 28 days.

### Damage identification

Rabbits can damage vegetable and flower gardens, trees, and shrubs any time of the year. Rabbit damage can be identified by the characteristic appearance of gnawing on older woody growth and the clean-cut, angled clipping of young stems. Among shade and ornamental trees, the hardest hit are the mountain ash, basswood, red maple, sugar maple, honey locust, ironwood, red and white oak, and willow.

### Damage prevention methods

Exclusion - One the best ways to protect a backyard garden or berry patch is to install either a wire or electric fence. Use a 3 foot, 1 inch mesh chicken wire (or plastic mesh) fence and install with the bottom bent 6 inches outward along the ground or buried a few inches and the top bent 6" outwards. A dome or cage of chicken wire secured over a small flower bed will protect vulnerable seedlings. To install an electric fence, string the bottom wire 2 inches above the ground on the outside and the top wire 4 inches above the ground on the inside.

Keep the wires weed and grass free. Charge with a garden electric fence charger. To protect trees and shrubs, enclose them with 1/4" wire hardware cloth. It should extend 18-20" above ground and 2-3" below ground. No supporting stakes are needed. The wire will remain effective for 5-10 years if left in place.

Habitat Modification - To reduce the rabbit's habitat, remove brush piles, weed patches, dumps, stone piles, and other debris where rabbits can hide or raise young.

Repellents - Several repellents are available that discourage the rabbits from eating or gnawing plants. Use repellents at the first sign of rabbit damage for greater control. Hinder is the most effective commercial rabbit repellent and can be used on all plants. Make the first application to all plants in the garden and to all vegetation immediately surrounding the garden within 10 feet. Thereafter, apply only to vulnerable plants with as little material as possible. Re-treat every 10-14 days or after every rain. Thiram is an effective repellent that can be used only on ornamental plants. Apply in late fall, when temperatures are above freezing, to all surfaces that rabbits might gnaw. Re-apply in late winter if necessary. Household repellents, which tend to be less effective, includes mothballs, dried blood meal, and used kitty litter from a cat that hunts outside. Scatter these in and around the garden once a week.

Trapping - Live traps (or wire cage traps), available at hardware stores, garden centers and Genesee County Animal Control can be effective. (contact MSUE for plans for a homemade trap). Place traps near where they feed or rest, near cover if possible. Check the traps daily and move them if they fail to make a catch within a week. Bait with half a corn cob, dried apples, dried clover or alfalfa in the winter and apples, carrots, cabbage and other fresh vegetables in warmer weather. Release rabbits several miles away in a rural area.

Poisons - There are no poisons registered for use against rabbits.

Shooting - Persistent shooting is a very effective control mechanism. Check with the DNR for specific regulations and permits.

Other methods - 1) Encourage the rabbit's natural enemies (hawk, owl, fox, mink, weasel, snake) to live in the area; 2) place a rubber hose on the ground, shaped like a snake, to frighten them away; 3) large, clear glass jars filled with water and placed in the garden may frighten them; 4) inflatable owls, snakes, eye spot balloons and other products can be used, but are the least effective.

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