



How to Deter Rabbits from the

EDIBLE GARDEN

How to Deter Rabbits from the Edible Garden



Rabbits and hares are adorable, fluffy, and extremely adept at destroying your edible garden in a few short hours. Commonly regarded by gardeners as a pest, rabbits see your garden as a safe place to eat, hide from predators, and raise their young. Here are a few tips to discourage them from sticking around and to protect the plants in your garden from becoming bunny food.



Signs of Rabbits in the Garden



If the bite marks on your plant stems are smooth, not jagged, and plant parts have been cut clean away, it may be the work of a rabbit (slugs and most insects tend to leave uneven holes and tears in foliage and other plant parts). Rabbits also love to get at the tender shoots of brand-new seedlings – in their opinion, this is gourmet dining. Mature plants are less likely to be targeted.

You might be able to see other telltale signs: footprints in late spring snows, or in mud or soft soil. Piles of small round droppings may be another indicator that rabbits have taken up residency in your garden. If your garden is deemed comfortable and free of predators, you'll often spot the animals themselves – you may catch them in the act of feeding on your vegetables, or taking a nap on the lawn. Your goal is to make your yard much less hospitable for them so they move on.



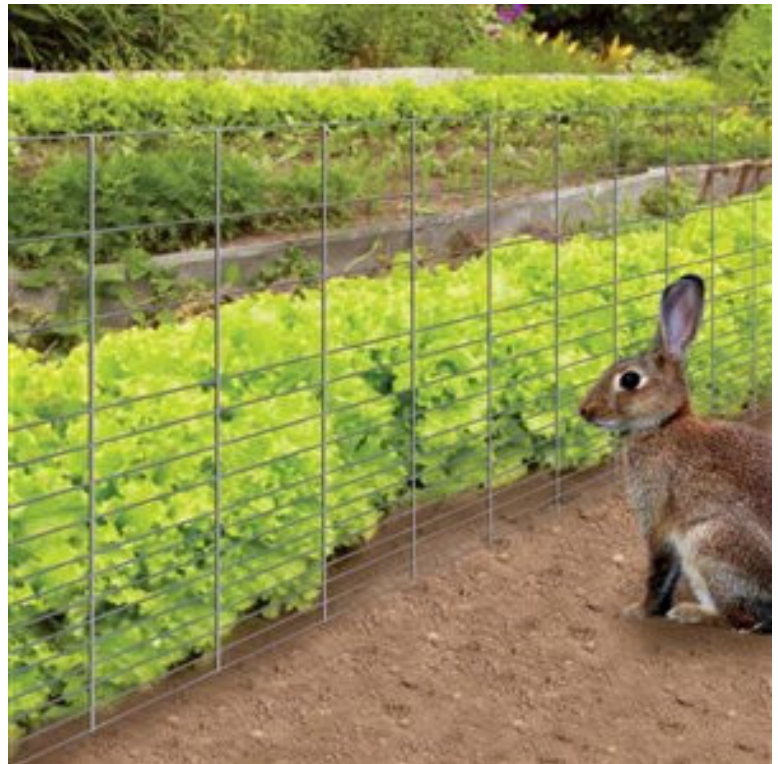
Rabbit Deterrents

Remove possible sites for rabbit habitat and hiding spots. Get rid of piles of brush and other debris. Keep up with weeding and mow down tall grass so that they don't have a place to dash to for cover when startled.

Rabbits have a superior sense of smell and are fearful of certain odours. Those from other animals (especially predators) may encourage them to move on. Try sprinkling blood meal around your plants. If you prefer sprays, you can purchase some made from repellant ingredients such as blood, sulphured eggs, garlic, and capsicum (pepper). Bear in mind that if you have pets, they may also react unfavourably to these products – pepper, for example, can be extremely harmful to cats and dogs if it gets in their eyes. If you decide to use such products, don't allow your pet to go into the area of application. Bottles of coyote urine are also available in some garden centres and hardware stores and may be applied to the soil surface. (Reapplication is necessary after every rainfall).

Hair – from humans or a pet dog – may work to discourage rabbits from the garden. Ask your hairdresser or dog groomer if they will part with some bags of hair, or you can simply check your own hairbrush and the grooming tools you use on your dog. Lay the hair around prized plants in the garden.

Use fencing to keep rabbits from chowing down on your vegetables and fruit. A general recommendation is for the fence to be 1.2 metres (4 feet) high and buried at least 15 centimetres (6 inches) into the soil to prevent digging underneath. If you have the inclination and the budget, the entire garden space may be fully enclosed by taller fence with a wire mesh roof.





Rabbit Deterrents

Make guards from hardware cloth or metal chicken wire. This is particularly useful for fruit trees, to prevent rabbits from gnawing on the bark during the wintertime. Severe damage can girdle the tree and possibly kill it. Make sure the guard is tall enough to protect the plants if the rabbit decides to stand upright and stretch up to reach the lower branches. Consider what this height will be when the base of the tree is snow-covered and the rabbit will be standing on higher ground! Don't buy plastic hardware cloth, as rabbits can chew through it. Make sure the gauge is small, so the rabbits can't stick their mouths through it and gnaw on the plants the guard is trying to protect.

A motion-activated water sprinkler will water your garden and spook bunnies at the same time! The biggest drawback of this is forgetting it is on and getting a shower when you go out into your yard.

Rabbits don't usually stick around if you own a dog and it is allowed to patrol the garden. If you don't allow your dog the free run of the yard, even simply walking it on a leash in the yard on a regular basis may be enough to let the rabbits know you mean business.

Remember to start using rabbit deterrents first thing in the spring, well before you see that the rabbits have discovered your garden. Don't wait until you find damage to take action.





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