Controlling Rabbits

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service

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controlling RABBITS

Cottontail rabbits are important game animals. They are highly valued for food and sporting qualities. These values are often outweighed, however, by the damage they do to ornamental plants, gardens, fruit trees, and farm crops. Rabbits cause damage by consuming desirable plants or portions of these plants and gnawing the bark during the winter months. Damage can be reduced by protecting valuable plants and/or reducing the rabbit population.

Wire Guards

Individual shrubs and young trees can be protected by cylindrical wire guards constructed of two or three foot hardware cloth or poultry netting. They should be several inches greater in diameter than the trunk or stem. If poultry netting is used, the wire guards must be braced to prevent rabbits from pressing them against the trunk and damaging the bark through the wire. In areas of heavy snow cover, rabbits will often damage the bark above the wire guards.

If hardware cloth is not available, temporary substitute materials such as burlap, heavy paper, aluminum foil, or plastic may be used. These substitute materials should never be used during the summer months as they can cause heat damage to the tree.

Fencing

During the growing season, it is often feasible to erect a wire fence around small areas of valuable flowers, garden crops, and nursery stock. A two-foot fence of 1 1/2-inch galvanized mesh wire is a sufficient barrier. The lower edges should be staked to the ground or slightly buried to prevent entrance under the fence. Where snow accumulates, a higher fence is necessary. It is usually too expensive to fence larger areas.

Repellents

Repellents offer another method for reducing damage caused by rabbits. Area or odor repellents, such as mothballs, creosote oil, bone tar oil, blood, tobacco dust, etc. are generally not effective.

Thiram is an effective taste repellent. It is available in varying forms and concentrations. Apply thiram to plant parts or other objects subject to damage before damage starts. This product may only be applied to fruit trees during the dormant season. Never apply thiram to plant parts that will be eaten by humans or domestic animals. Consult product label for specific mixing and application directions. READ AND FOLLOW ALL LABEL DIRECTIONS.

Cultural Practices

Clean cultivation and the removal of brush piles and heavy weed growth.
growth along fences and the like will take away rabbit cover. This tends to reduce their numbers in areas where they are causing damage.

Hunting

In rural areas, intensive hunting is recommended as a measure to keep rabbit numbers within reasonable limits and reduce damage caused by them.

Trapping

In many places hunting may not be practical and the animals must be removed with traps. There are several types of home-made traps, such as the one illustrated below.