

Rabbit, Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)



Figure 1 Cottontail Rabbit



Figure 2 Angled cuts

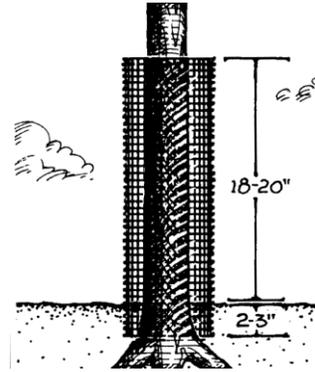


Figure 3 Wire mesh cylinder on woody plant

Damage

Rabbit-chewed plants are cut off cleanly and small, round droppings are usually found nearby. Stems of herbaceous plants are nipped off cleanly at an angle. Rabbits damage woody plants by gnawing bark or clipping off branches, stems and buds. When the ground is covered by snow for long periods, rabbits can clip off plants at snow height. Rabbits carry a disease called tularemia that can be passed on to people who handle infected rabbits. Seek medical attention if fever, chills, aches and pains develop within one to two weeks after handling rabbits.

When Are They Active

Rabbits are active year-round and primarily at night.

Susceptible Plants

Flowers, vegetables, trees and shrubs are susceptible at any time of year. In spring and summer, rabbits primarily feed on herbaceous plants. In fall and winter, rabbits feed on woody vegetation, preferring those of the rose family. In the vegetable garden beans, peas and greens such as lettuces and spinach are commonly damaged. Corn, squash, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, potatoes are usually rabbit resistant.

Prevention/Control Methods

Excluding rabbits from areas using non-plastic fencing is very effective. A fence of 2-foot chicken wire with 1-inch mesh with the bottom tight to the ground or buried a few inches is sufficient. Cylinders of wire hardware cloth with ¼ inch mesh size will protect young orchard trees or landscape plants and should be buried 3 inches below the soil surface; guards must be at least 18" higher than the average winter snow line. Extermination is usually not necessary or advisable. Natural ways to reduce a local rabbit population include encouraging the rabbits' natural enemies (hawks, owls, fox, mink, weasels, snakes) and manipulation of the rabbit's habitat. Remove brush piles, weed patches, junk dumps, stone piles, and debris. Repellents containing blood or bone meal, predator urine, pepper and moth balls may be effective.

Additional Information/Resources

- Protecting Gardens and Landscape Plantings from Rabbits ([G1654](#))
- Rabbit Ecology & Damage Management ([G3997](#))
- Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management <http://icwdm.org>
- Rutgers If Plants Could Talk Series [Keeping Rabbits From Desirable Plants in Your Garden](#)
- Dane County UW Extension Horticulture Hotline [608-224-3721](tel:608-224-3721) (M-F, 9 am-12 noon, April 15 – October 31) or horticulture@countyofdane.com