

P-Patch Community Gardening Program

RABBITS IN THE GARDEN

Tip

PP411

06-16-17

P-Patch TIPS are reference documents that address topics related to the development and ongoing management of P-Patch Community Gardens.

Wild Rabbits

Although not native to the Puget Sound Region, rabbits have become well adapted to our urban environments. They have been showing up more and more in P-Patch Community Gardens across Seattle.

Rabbits in the Puget Sound Region

While there are no rabbits native to the Puget Sound Region, there are two kinds of rabbits that are native to eastern and central Washington State.

- The first is the **Nuttall's Cottontail** (*Sylvilagus nuttallii*), which is about 14 inches long.
- The second is the **Pygmy rabbit** (*Sylvilagus idahoensis*) that averages 11 inches in length.

In addition to the native rabbits, there are two other kinds of rabbits that have been introduced to the Puget Sound Region.

- The first is the **domestic rabbit** (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), introduced to the San Juan Islands in 1900. Size ranges from 20 to 30 inches long.
- **Eastern cottontail** (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) is the second type of rabbit introduced to Washington by humans. During the 1930's, Eastern cottontails were introduced to the area as a game animals. They average 17 inches in length.

Lifespan

Rabbits have fewer predators in urban environments. That couple with the fact that they are very successful breeders (sometimes reproducing up to 5 times per year), means their population in a given area can grow rapidly. Rabbits are particularly prevalent during spring and summer when there is sufficient cover and an abundance of vegetation.



Baby Rabbits at Magnuson P-Patch

Reproduction

Wild rabbits breed mid-February through late summer. The gestation period is 30 days and the litters can have up to 8 bunnies.

It is not uncommon for the mother to stay away from the nest. She does this to protect the location of her young from potential predators and only returns at dusk to feed and clean them.

Possible Interventions

- **Barriers:** Barriers seem to be most affective. You need to be at least 3 inches below the soil line to be effective. Fences, chicken wire cylinders, nylon mesh, and plastic tubes are the most common barriers used.
- **Row Covers:** Row covers are laid down after planting and removed during flowering to allow for pollination. Material can be purchased at local garden centers.
- **Habitat Restructuring:** Habitat restructuring can involve making the garden both less welcoming to rabbits and more welcoming to their natural predators. Examples include constructing and installing an owl house or a perch for hawks.



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- **Scare Tactics & Devices.** Mylar tape and mylar party balloons, scarecrows, pinwheels, and plastic owls must be located at the ground level to be effective.
- **Rabbit Detering Plants.** Rabbits don't like onions, chives (any of the onion family plants), mints, oregano, rosemary, sage, thyme, lavender, lemon balm, and many other aromatic herbs.
- **An All-in-One Homemade Rabbit Repellent**
 - Mix the following in a 1-gallon tank sprayer:
 - 2 beaten and strained eggs— strain them to remove the white strings surrounding the yolk, which will plug up your sprayer)
 - 1 cup milk, yogurt, buttermilk, or sour milk
 - 2 tsp. Tabasco sauce or cayenne pepper
 - 20 drops essential oil of clove, cinnamon, or eucalyptus
 - 1 tsp. cooking or dormant oil
 - 1 tsp. liquid dish soap

Top off the tank with water and pump it up. Shake the sprayer occasionally and mist onto dry foliage. One application will last for 2 to 4 weeks in dry weather.

This homemade repellent was originally created to repel deer. However, WA Department of Fish & Wildlife found it to be effective with wild rabbits as well.

Direct Control Methods

Trapping and relocation are NOT allowed for many reasons.

- Transporting wild rabbits without proper documentation is **against the law in WA State** and only spreads the problem to other areas.
- Most wild animals when relocated don't adjust to the new area and end up dying.

Public Health Concerns

Wild rabbits can be infected with a bacterial disease called tularemia and for that reason the WA Department of Fish & Wildlife does not recommend capturing the rabbits for human consumption. Humans can contract tularemia by ingesting undercooked rabbit meat or by handling a dead or sick rabbit.

Additional Resources

WA Department of Fish & Wildlife-Living with Wildlife

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/rabbits.html>

Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management

<http://icwdm.org/handbook/mammals/CottontailRabbits.asp>

Paws Wildlife Center

<https://www.paws.org/wildlife/center/humane-solutions/>

The Garden Hotline/Tilth Alliance

A free service staffed by horticultural professionals that provides information on natural garden and lawn care and soil building to Seattle and King County residents and landscape professionals.

Phone: (206) 633-0224

Email: help@gardenhotline.org

Website: www.gardenhotline.org

Denver Urban Gardeners Rabbit Management Policy

<https://dug.org/app/uploads/2016/08/16-Rabbit-Policy-copy.pdf>

The information listed on this document was retrieved from WA Department of Fish & Wildlife.

