



Denver Urban Gardens Rabbit Management Policy

Policy: The following information provides DUG-approved recommendations for managing rabbits in your community garden, including both short-term deterrents and long-term preventative measures.

Scope: This policy applies to all gardeners growing in community gardens in the Denver Urban Gardens (DUG) network.

Background: Rabbits typically require dense brush and shrubby areas to live in, as these areas provide them with cover from predators. Rabbits feed on leafy vegetation during the summer and the buds and bark of woody plants during the winter. They have become well adapted to the urban environment and are a common problem for the city gardener. Because rabbits have fewer predators in urban environments, coupled with the fact that they are very successful breeders (sometimes reproducing up to 5 times per year), their population in a given area can grow rapidly. Rabbits are particularly prevalent during the spring and summer when there is sufficient cover and an abundance of vegetation. It is common for rabbits to eat garden vegetables, whether as a source of food or hydration. To combat this, there are multiple ways to manage rabbits, both in the short and long term, to keep them from damaging the plants in your community garden.

Process: Consult the following recommendations in order to determine the best rabbit management strategy for your garden. There are both short-term and long-term options, which may be preferable depending on whether gardeners wish to allow rabbits to use the garden as a habitat.

* As there is no way to legally or humanely exterminate rabbits, **DUG prohibits exterminating rabbits in community gardens.** This position is informed by wildlife experts and city officials. Relocation is *not* recommended due to the likelihood that rabbits would not be wanted elsewhere, and that most wildlife die soon after relocation from either starvation or predation.

* Should you find a juvenile or injured rabbit in your garden, the website <http://www.rabbit.org/faq/sections/orphan.html> can provide you with proper care and treatment options and contacts.

Short-Term Deterrents

Homemade pest sprays: Given that rabbits have a keen sense of smell and sensitive taste buds, odorous homemade pest sprays can help to discourage rabbits in the short-term from feeding in your garden. DUG suggests applying a homemade hot pepper and garlic spray to your plants. To make this spray, mix 4 - 6 cloves of garlic and some chopped up hot peppers (at least 3 or 4 serranos, and maybe even 1 habanero) in a blender with enough water to fill a spray container. Process these ingredients in the blender and let the blended mixture sit over night. The following day, strain the mixture through cheesecloth, add a few teaspoons of dishwashing detergent and spray it on the leaves of your plants. (When using liquid soaps, non-detergent soaps like Dr. Bronner's work best for pest sprays). Reapply spray periodically as needed, especially after heavy rain. Other homemade deterrents include sprinkling chili powder around the base of plants or creating a spray mixture of egg, milk, garlic, tabasco sauce and a few drops of liquid dishwashing soap.

Row Covers: DUG's DeLaney Farm has had a great deal of success in warding off pests, including rabbits, with the use of row covers. Row covers are laid down soon after planting and removed during flowering to allow for pollination. This material can be purchased at local garden centers.

Providing alternate water sources: In hot and dry conditions, dehydrated rabbits may look to fresh vegetables in order to obtain water. Though seemingly counterintuitive, placing a bowl of water out in areas of the garden may help deter rabbits from eating produce by meeting their more basic need of sufficient hydration.

Long-Term Preventative Measures

Fencing: The most effective and relatively inexpensive rabbit prevention method is constructing a rabbit-proof fence. This involves burying a band of rabbit wire in a trench under the base of your garden's perimeter fence to a depth of at least 6 inches, while having the top of the rabbit wire overlap the garden fence at least 2 feet above ground, supported by posts every 6-8 feet. Rabbit wire is similar to chicken wire, but with smaller holes (look for holes about 1 inch in diameter), as some rabbits can easily squeeze through the larger holes in chicken wire. We recommend either securely staking the wire into the ground or bending the rabbit wire outward in an L-shape at the bottom of the trench, as well as bending the wire in a similar fashion at the top of the band to further discourage rabbit entry.

In order to ensure that the rabbit fence is effective, be certain to rabbit-proof all gates and entryways into the garden. Rabbit-proof gates by setting pavers to form a solid surface at the base of the gate, then either installing rabbit wire that extends below the base of the gate to just above the ground or being certain that the bottom of the gate is one inch or less from the pavers. If the gate has open spaces that a rabbit might fit through, the bottom portion of the gate should be proofed with rabbit wire as well.

Habitat restructuring: Habitat restructuring can involve making the garden both less welcoming to rabbits and more welcoming to their natural predators. Natural predators of rabbits include owls, hawks, foxes, coyotes, snakes, minks, and weasels. Some examples of restructuring the environment to welcome such predators include constructing and installing an owl house or a perch for hawks. *(As a reminder, if you choose to develop one of these types of projects, please contact DUG for approval prior to construction.)*

Minimizing rabbit cover in the garden, including removing tall grasses or weed patches, rock piles, and removing or heavily trimming shrubs and vine thickets, will decrease the amount of “safe” spaces in the garden for rabbits to hide. However, note that many of these features, particularly raspberry bushes or other fruit-producing plants, can help prevent non-gardeners from entering the garden and taking produce. Properly disposing of collected plant waste in a timely fashion will also assist in minimizing rabbit cover.

In accordance with wildlife experts’ recommendations and DUG’s organic gardening policies, gardeners **should NOT**

- Spray non-organic pest sprays on plants to deter rabbits.
- Attempt to catch or kill rabbits.
- Cook rabbits that you might find or capture as these wild rabbits carry harmful parasites rendering them unsafe for human consumption.