Managing Critters in Vegetable Gardens
Summary Information

5/5/2025

Rabbits, Javelina

- Cottontail rabbits: Sturdy 2-foot tall poultry wire fence stretched tight to the ground and preferably buried at least 2 inches.
- Jackrabbits: 3-foot tall fence buried at least 6 inches below ground.
- Javelina: Sturdy four foot tall fence of chain link or woven wire with 2 feet poultry wire along the base is adequate.

References: Rabbits – BYG#100, Javelina - BYG#32

Squirrels, Woodrats (aka Packrats)

- Squirrels and woodrats can climb as well as dig and may require complete enclosure with poultry wire.

References: Squirrels - BYG#24, Woodrats – BYG#23

Porcupines, Beavers

- The best strategy to prevent damage from porcupines is exclusion. Fences, climbing barriers, and cages around plants are commonly used. For gardens, 18 inch tall poultry wire with a smooth electric wire 1.5 inches above the top is effective. Also, a simple smooth electric wire 4-6 inches above ground can provide adequate protection. This also prevents beaver damage

References: Porcupines - BYG#31, Beavers - BYG#97

Racoons

The best damage control strategies for raccoons are habitat modification and exclusion. Remove any food or water source, feed pets indoors, and secure garbage containers to prevent access. Restrict access to your roof by pruning trees away from eves and otherwise limiting access to the roof. Cover chimneys with hardware cloth or a metal cover when not in use. Keep poultry enclosed in a secure building at night. Raccoons can climb almost any fence, but the addition of an electric wire strand (using a UL fence charger) at the top of the fence will likely discourage them. Electric fences alone can also be used with two strands: one at 6 inches and another at 12 inches above the ground. Raccoons will also dig under fences, so bury woven wire two feet below the soil surface.

Reference: BYG#111

Cattle, Horses, Elk

Cattle and horses require a standard ranch-type fence that will withstand rubbing and pushing. Elk are perhaps the most difficult to exclude. Twelve-foot wire fences are often used, but aggressive bull elk can break through almost any wire fence.

Reference: BYG#115

Gophers

- Create an underground barrier of hardware cloth. This should be at least 2 feet deep.
- Exclusion is one strategy used to mitigate pocket gopher damage to young plants, raised beds, and small garden plots. Metal fencing material is sometimes buried around the perimeter of small garden spaces. Galvanized metal hardware cloth (1/4-inch or 1/2-inch) can be buried 18 inches deep around garden

fences. Some gophers will dig deeper than this, but it will probably be dependable about 90% of the time. Gophers also travel above ground but are not likely to climb higher than one foot over a fence. Placing hardware cloth underneath constructed raised beds is also very effective as long as the gophers cannot climb over the sides of the bed.

Hexagonal poultry wire is often used to create wire baskets that are installed at planting to protect the roots of young woody plants such as fruit trees. Poultry wire with the smallest openings (one-inch) should be used. There are some caveats with this approach. First, remember that gophers travel above ground and can simply walk over the fence if it does not extend above ground for a foot or so. Also, roots can easily grow beyond the cage and become vulnerable to gopher feeding. In addition, the wire could stunt the plant due to root girdling (disruption of secondary phloem under the bark) as the roots grow in diameter where they go through the wire basket. In many cases the wire will have started to disintegrate before serious root girdling occurs

Reference: BYG#45

Deer

Fencing is the only long-term solution. The fence should be at least 8 feet tall and constructed out of woven wire, high tension wire, UV stabilized vinyl mesh, or other strong, durable material. Deer can and will jump fences under 8 feet. Small areas can be protected with shorter fences (4 to 6 feet) as deer do not like to jump into small enclosed spaces. Another design utilizes the small area concept by placing two low fences 38 inches apart. In this design, the deer feel unable to clear both fences without injury. Woven wire cages can also be built to protect individual plants.

Electric fences can also be employed. At least two wires will be needed: one at 18 inches and another at 36 inches above ground. While they could jump over the wires, they prefer to crawl under and will touch the lower wire in doing so. Some people also use a third wire placed at 24 inches above ground. If you want to attract them to nuzzle the wire, put a little peanut butter inside some aluminum foil on it. Once shocked, they are more likely to avoid the fenced area. Remember to attach warning signs to alert people to the electric fence. I have included some additional deer management resources below. However, keep in mind that deer are game species in Arizona and deer management information developed in other states may not be legal in Arizona.

Some people do not care for fences (or cannot use them due to local ordinances). In these situations, repellents (contact or area) may be worth trying. Contact repellents are applied directly to the plant and repel by taste. Area repellents repel deer by odor alone. Drawbacks to repellents are: most can only be applied to non-edible crops, the effect is temporary, new growth not treated with contact repellents is not protected, deer may habituate (become used to) to the repellent, and, if deer want something bad enough, they will often find a way to it. While many people swear that nylon stockings filled with human hair and bars of soap repel deer, these home remedies are typically not as reliable as products labeled as deer repellents. Dogs may also help prevent deer damage in areas where they have access, assuming they are present at night.

Reference: BYG#3