

Rabbit-Proof Plants

Let's talk about bunny rabbits. You know, those cute, furry little critters known for runaway procreation and bringing Easter eggs? Ok, yes, they also love to eat your garden plants, especially the pretty new ones you just spent the better part of the afternoon planting.

With the abundant forage produced by record rainfall this past winter, the rabbit population is expected to go through the roof. As the summer heat takes its toll on the rabbits' natural sources of food, they will move into our landscapes in search of food & water. Since most of our neighbors take a dim view of shotguns being discharged in our residential areas, let's discuss some more viable options.

There are a number of repellants on the market that use the urine of predators to keep bunnies out of your plants. Most need to be applied on a regular basis (every week or so) and I have some clients that swear by them. I do know others, though, that think they do not work at all. It may be worth a try if other methods fail.

Keeping rabbits out physically can be achieved by way of hardware cloth or chicken wire. Unless you have the artistic touch, this method had the disadvantage of being unsightly. If possible, consider blocking the entire yard from their invasion, being careful not to forget drainage tiles and spaces under the gate. Of course, a completely fenced rear yard is ideal for critter protection.

Ice plants, Ruellias, Agaves, Paddle Cactus are all succulent snacks to a rabbit, as well as anything young & newly planted. Being a landscaper, I think the best option for discouraging rabbits is to plant species that they just plain ol' do not like to eat. The Euphorbia is a large family of plants containing a caustic sap that rabbits will avoid like the plague. This genus contains around 2,000 species, having a wide range of body shapes and habitats. The Poinsettia is perhaps the most commonly known example. Many of the members of this group mimic cactus and succulents in appearance, thus being very useful in our southwest landscapes. One very showy Euphorbia favorite is the Firestick. Others include Gopher Plant and Turks Cap.

We all have individual needs when it comes to our yards. Whether you are a sprayer, fencer or planter, it is always a worthwhile goal to figure out a way to live in harmony with the environment around us, including our cute, fuzzy, plant-loving friends.