

# Rabbit control for small landowners

## *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

### Rabbits a problem?

If rabbits are causing problems on your property, in paddocks, to horticultural crops or in orchards or forestry areas there are some things you can do to help control numbers and minimise the damage they cause.

The simplest thing you can do is make your property a less attractive habitat for rabbits. High quality pasture and low levels of weeds reduce rabbits feeding options, and removal of heaps of logs, piles of stones and small scrubby shrubs reduces their nesting habitats.



### Why are they a pest?

Burrows are the most common damage caused by rabbits but may not always be visible. Rabbits will dig holes and eat the grass on garden lawns as well as paddocks, eat plants and small trees in vegetable and flower gardens and chew bark off trees.

### Control

Control methods include exclusion fencing and chemical repellents (these will help minimise damage caused by rabbits), poisoning, fumigation, shooting, and trapping (these will reduce actual numbers of rabbits on the property).

- **Exclusion fencing**

For effective long-term protection, enclose the area with a netting fence. Mesh size should be 2.5 - 3cm in diameter, 80cm high and the bottom of the fence needs to be tightly pegged to the ground or buried 20cm into the ground.

Check and maintain the fence regularly to make sure rabbits are not burrowing underneath. Although initially exclusion fencing is relatively expensive, if maintained it will be effective for many years.

To protect individual plants and trees try:

- Surrounding the plant with a small circle of netting, 80cm high.
- Wrapping a piece of tin, aluminium, corrugated cardboard or newspaper around the trunk and secure.
- Cutting out the base of a container, 20 litre or larger, and place around the plant.
- Stretching heavy plastic sheeting or netting around the plant, secure to stakes and either pin to the ground or bury it slightly.
- Electric fencing might be suitable in some situations.
- Winding twine or hemp, soaked in creosote or liquid tar, on stakes around the plant.

#### ○ Repellents

Chemical repellents, when sprayed or painted on trees and shrubs can discourage rabbit browsing. Remember this will need to be done regularly as new growth appears.

**Some effective repellents you can try are:**

- Egg powder mixed with acrylic paint. This is considered the most effective repellent. This mix is called Treepol and is available commercially, or you can make your own version:

To make 15 litres, which will treat 700 trees use:

- 1kg whole egg powder
- 2 litres Primal AC 235 Acrylic Resin
- 12 litres water

**Preparation:** Mix egg with a little warm water to form a paste, add resin and remaining water. Pour through a strainer into the applicator.

**Application:** Spray approximately 20-30ml over and around each seedling immediately after planting. A second application may be needed in spring.

Thoroughly clean equipment with water following use. Store left over mixture in freezer for future use.

- Thiropel/Thiropel, a weather resistant commercial repellent.
- Lime sulphur. Spray on the lower parts of trees in the spring with a strong lime sulphur wash with a little lime added.
- Jeyes fluid. A strong solution of Jeyes fluid will give temporary protection if sprayed evenly around plants.
- Sprinkle the garden with naphthalene moth balls or blood and bone fertiliser.

## ○ Fumigants

Fumigants are poisons in the form of a toxic gas which, when inhaled, result in death. One advantage of fumigants is that they may be introduced into the rabbit burrow and do not require the animal to eat the poison. Fumigants are effective in controlling young rabbits which do not wander far from the burrow and are difficult to shoot or poison. Fumigant use is, however, labour intensive and is best used as a back up to shooting or poisoning. A suitable fumigant is: Magotoxin which produces phosphine gas

***Before using any poison read the poison label, comply with the handling instructions, and ensure you understand the symptoms and the recommended first aid treatment.***

### **How to fumigate a rabbit burrow:**

- Using a spade widen the opening to the burrow for easy access then cut a sod of earth the size of the opening for plugging the entrance.
- Block of any other burrow entrances.
- Wearing rubber gloves and protective clothing take the required amount of fumigant from the airtight container and close immediately afterwards.
- Do not inhale fumigant.
- Place fumigant at least 40cm inside the burrow and seal immediately with the sod with the grass side down being careful not to cover the fumigant with earth.

## ○ Poison

### **Pindone**

Pindone is a slow-acting anti-coagulant poison bait available for public purchase from farming stores in pellet or liquid form (applied to carrots). Heavy dew or rain will affect the palatability of the bait. Purchase just enough Pindone to complete the job as the product has a shelf life of only 6-8 months.

Pindone is safe to lay providing precautions are taken to keep children, pets and stock out of the area. Also make sure you let your neighbours and other people using the property know when you lay the poison. Read the instructions on the label carefully and if accidental poisoning occurs contact your doctor or vet immediately.

Vitamin K1, available from your vet, is an effective antidote for pets with suspected poisoning.

- **Shooting**

Shooting may be difficult if neighbours are close by. Provided it can be done safely, shooting with a rifle or shotgun during the day or night shooting using a spotlight, can be effective for controlling light rabbit infestations. Shooting is most successful on properties with little cover.

- **Trapping**

The use of traps can be effective in reducing rabbit numbers, particularly individual animals, however, it is time consuming, and requires skill and patience to work successfully.

Smeuse or tunnel traps work well when placed in a regular entranceway and leg hold traps are effective but may harm non-target species. Make sure you check with your local city or district council before choosing a trap as some types may not be allowed.

**Contact us on free phone 0508 800 800 if you would like help controlling rabbits on your property. We can provide free advice and information and if needed, we can offer user-pays assistance.**