

With apologies to Beatrix Potter there are bad rabbits!



At this time of year nothing is growing in our gardens, but that doesn't mean nothing is happening. In my garden I have intruders or what might be better described as bad rabbits.

Last winter many plants in my garden were badly damaged by hungry bunnies. The list included 2 roses, lavender, a deutzia, a large blackberry bush, a hydrangea, and a burning bush. All of these had the bark eaten and resulted in girdled stems. This meant no new growth above the eaten sections and required cutting the plants back to about 6 inches tall to stimulate new growth. All the plants survived but I had no blackberries; they fruit on the previous year's

growth, no flowers on the deutzia or hydrangea; they bloom on the previous year's growth, the rest were very late blooming.

This picture is the burning bush originally about 5 feet tall; the bark was eaten up to a height of about 24 inches. I have a mental picture of rabbits standing on each other's shoulders to reach that high! >

This one is rabbit pruned lavender. And now the rabbits are back! They live in a neighbour's yard behind my house; the owners cut the grass about once a year whether it needs it or not, and by doing so they create a perfect home for many rabbits.



How can we protect our gardens from this sort of damage? There are several ways, physical barriers such as wire mesh work very well. The fence should be made of 1 inch galvanized steel mesh or hardware cloth 18 to 24 inches high. This is what I did with my blackberry bush this year. Last year the snow was deep enough that the rabbits could walk over the snow to eat the bark.

Other suggested options are potions made of tabasco, garlic, hot peppers etc, I cannot bring myself to do that, the ingredients inevitably get in the animals' eyes and it hurts. I want to dissuade them from eating my shrubs but I'm okay with them eating dropped bird seed, or the thyme in my patio.

Another option is Plantskydd; a commercially available animal repellent that smells awful, the ingredients are dried blood and vegetable oil only. The vegetable oil sticks to the plants even during severe snow/rainfall conditions for up to 6 months over winter.

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If you have garden questions please contact us at streetsvillehort@hotmail.com check out our website at www.streetsvillehort.ca