



desert cottontail foraging on damaged turf

Open Space and Natural Resources Division

We are Stewards of Natural Resources Essential to Aurora's Quality of Life

Natural Resource Bulletin

Passive, Non-lethal Cottontail Deterrents

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Frequently Asked Questions:

Are cottontails a protected species?

Desert and eastern cottontails (the species of cottontail found in Aurora) do not have special designations or protections in Colorado and can be treated or controlled by property owners using legal methods. Visit the Colorado Parks and Wildlife website for a detailed list of regulations related to cottontail management.

What can I do about cottontail damage on my property?

This resource bulletin offers passive, non-lethal tips and ideas for deterring cottontails. It is always an option to hire a licensed wildlife damage control specialist to assist with mitigating damage from cottontails. Use the internet or a local phone book to find local, professional providers.

Should I be concerned about disease?

As with any wild animal, it is important to use caution and AVOID ALL DIRECT CONTACT with cottontails.

- Do not allow pets to chase, play with or handle rabbits, dead or alive.
- Do not handle sick or dead rabbits.
- Teach children to avoid handling sick or dead rabbits.
- Do not feed or play with rabbits.
- Teach children not to feed or play with rabbits.

AVOID FLEAS & TICKS.

- Protect pets with pet-specific flea and tick spray.

Understanding three basic cottontail behaviors may help you deter them:

Cottontails are opportunistic herbivores. Cottontails love tasty, easy to eat plants such as garden vegetables and leafy landscaping. In winter months, when green plants are scarce, cottontails may strip the bark off trees and shrubs, causing damage to or killing woody plants. Drought and heavy snow can temporarily amplify the damage cottontails will cause to woody plants, gardens, and yards.

Cottontails are a prey species and rely on having lots of cover to escape would be predators. Cottontails do not excavate their own burrow, but they will take advantage of existing suitable cover such as brush piles, fence rows, foundation gaps and dense landscaping such as shrubby junipers.

Under favorable conditions cottontails can raise as many as 6 litters in a year producing 4 to 7 young per litter. In natural areas, these high birth rates are typically balanced by high death rates due to predation, disease, and parasites. Due to the high reproductive potential of cottontails and lack of natural predators in urban environments, lethal control of individual rabbits is usually not effective for the long-term. Nonlethal methods such as exclusion techniques and habitat modification provide long-term solutions to cottontail conflict.

Habitat Modification:

One way to reduce cottontail populations is to reduce available habitat and food resources. Removing brush piles, stone piles, weedy patches, and other debris where cottontails hide or live is a great way to manage cottontails in urban areas. Sealing known access points under decks and foundations using buried hardware cloth or chicken wire.

Planting rabbit resistant plants—generally plants with harsh flavors or physical barriers such as spines—can make your garden less attractive to cottontails. Check with your local nursery for rabbit resistant plant ideas.

Fencing Barriers:

One of the best ways to protect landscaping from cottontail damage is selective fencing around individual plants, shrubs, trees or garden areas. Exclusion fencing should extend about two feet above ground, at least four inches underground and be placed at least two inches from the vegetation being protected. Mesh should measure one inch or smaller, so young rabbits can't get through. With proper care a fence will last many years and provide selective relief damage caused by cottontails.

Repellents:

Some chemical repellents can temporarily discourage cottontails from browsing on plants. Taste repellents only protect the treated part of the plant; new growth after treatment is not protected and treatments must be repeated after precipitation. Dried blood meal or mothballs are sometimes useful in preventing damage to specific plants or areas. Typically taste repellents are more effective than odor repellents. Commercially available coyote urine can be used as an odor repellent, but may encourage coyotes to investigate treated areas.

For more information, please visit Aurora's Living with Wildlife page.

Resources:

Cottontails Species Profile, Colorado Parks and Wildlife 2012

Damage Prevention and Control Methods: Cottontail Rabbits, Scott R. Craven 1994

Mammals of North America second edition, Roland W. Kays and Don E. Wilson 2009

