

Guidance note

How to protect your garden from rabbits

Rabbits are a big problem to the gardener and a rabbit-proof fence is a good way to keep them away from vulnerable plants. However, a fence will only keep out rabbits if it is properly constructed.

Rabbits can jump, are good diggers and have strong teeth to bite and chew. They can also get through openings that seem much smaller than their bodies – they can squeeze through any hole their heads can fit through. So a fence has to be able to resist these four things.

Fence specifications:

- Avoid any material a rabbit could chew through such as plastic or wood. Wire mesh is best, and chicken wire works very well.
- Mesh size should be a maximum of 31mm (about an inch and a half), any bigger and young rabbits can get through.
- The fence height should be about 1m (just over 3 feet), any lower and rabbits can jump over.
- The bottom of the fence should be dug in to a depth of about 20cm (6 inches) and about 20 cm (6 inches) folded into an L shape facing away from the plot.
- Stakes should be 3m apart, and corners well braced to take the weight and tension of the wire fence.
- Strands of barbed wire should be run along the top and half way down the fence to deter other grazing animals. The top strand can be tensioned to take the weight of the wire fence and stop it sagging.
- Gates are often the weak point of a fence. They need to be well fitting, with hinges set low and a curtain of wire hanging below and around the gate to prevent rabbits from squeezing through.
- Alternatively to a gate, build a simple wooden stile to step over the fence.
- Clear away weeds and vegetation from around the outside of the fence. This deters rabbits and also makes it easy for you to check the fence for damage or digging.
- A fence is only as good as it lasts, so needs to be checked regularly and maintained.
- For further information please contact ANRD on 4724.