



Guidance note

How to trap rabbits

Rabbits are a big problem to the gardener. Cage traps will catch rabbits unharmed; they can be killed for the pot and any other animals or birds which are accidentally caught can be released unharmed.

A trap is only as good as the skill of the trapper and that comes with experience. Many individual rabbits won't enter traps so trapping should be used in combination with other techniques such as fencing and shooting (see Guidance Note No 1: How to protect your garden from rabbits).

How many traps?

- First estimate the **number of traps required**. For reasonable rapid and effective control, you should have 3 to 5 traps set at any one time for every 10 rabbits you estimate are using the area. The best way to estimate numbers is to count grazing rabbits at dusk or dawn.
- In a garden situation where 5 to 10 rabbits are causing a problem, set a **minimum of four traps**.

Where do I place them?

- Traps should be about **10 paces apart** and parallel to the harbourage from which the rabbits are coming.
- Make sure each trap is **firmly sitting** on level ground by grinding it back and forth to bed it in. You could spread a little soil on the floor of the trap. The trap must not rock when the rabbit enters.
- If the ground is sloping, face the trap door **downhill**.

What baits do I use?

- The best bait is chopped **carrots** (10cm lengths). If you don't have carrots try one of the following:
 - Commercial rabbit pellets
 - Commercial chicken pellets
 - Peanut butter on small pieces of bread
 - Local peaches, cut into pieces
 - Chopped cabbage
- Bait each trap with **10 pieces of bait** (6 beyond the treadle, 2 just in front of the treadle and 2 just in the entrance. Bait outside the trap with a further 5 pieces, 2 just outside the trap entrance and the remaining 3 at one pace intervals directly away from the trap entrance and parallel to the harbourage).

- Make sure that the trap plate is set so that any animal stepping on the plate will easily trigger the mechanism to drop the door. Make sure that the door drops easily and closes cleanly. Make any adjustments necessary to the trap mechanism to ensure **everything works smoothly and reliably**.
- **Uneaten bait** should be replaced as soon as it starts to deteriorate, the fresher the bait the better.
- Once the outside bait is being regularly eaten, replace only the bait inside the trap.

How do I remove and kill rabbits?

- You must check set traps **at least twice a day**, morning and evening.
- Rabbits may be removed by putting a **hessian bag** over the trap entrance and encouraging the rabbit to go into the sack. Once in the sack it is easier to reach in and to get hold of.
- Or, reach into the trap and **grasp the rabbit** by its' scruff or its' hind legs. Grip securely as it might well struggle.
- In order to **quickly and cleanly kill the rabbit**, hold it up by its rear legs so its head is facing down towards the ground and away from you. Using a good heavy stick with a firm grip, strike the back of its head with a hard blow. Strike with confidence and that should kill it instantly, but follow this up with a second blow to make certain. Expect some twitching and leg kicking even after death – this is only some final nerve activity.
- Any other animals caught should be **released unharmed**.

How long to trap for?

- Once you start trapping, try to keep up the effort for a **continuous period**. Often it will take a **month** to clear rabbits from an area.
- Where you manage to trap **over half the rabbits** initially seen over the first 10 days of trapping, you will probably achieve a very good level of control over the next 20 days.
- Where you have caught **less than a quarter of the rabbits** initially seen within the first 10 days, consider placing the traps in a better position and try again, or change the bait.

Check your traps twice a day, remove any non-target species and kill rabbits quickly and humanely.

For further information please contact ANRD on 24724.

