

## Pro Tips:

### Dealing With Unwanted Critters in the Garden - Susan Mulvihill



#### Introduction:

- The first step is to know what you're dealing with
  - Look for pawprints and examine the damage
  - Consider using a game camera to see who's visiting
  - Then employ the most efficient strategies
- Know your laws
  - Is trapping legal?
  - Releasing elsewhere upsets the balance of its new environment, pest can have trouble finding food, other animals in the new location often fight or kill them
- Never use poisons because they also will kill pest's predators
- Animal repellents: always read the label to determine if they're safe to use around edible crops. Follow the directions!

#### Specific Garden Pests:

##### **Birds:**

- Examples: blackbirds, cowbirds, crows, finches, pheasants, pigeons, quail, turkeys
- Typical signs of their damage: multiple small bites out of the tender parts of leaves
- Favorite plants: young seedlings, lettuce and other leafy greens, melons, tomatoes, berries
- Scare them:
  - Scarecrow or bird-scaring decoys: iffy, move them around frequently
  - Pinwheels, hang up CDs, attach mylar tape or ribbon
  - Hang a hawk kite nearby
  - Hang windchimes nearby
  - Place toy snakes on and around targeted plants
- Create a barrier:
  - Floating row cover or bird netting on hoops
  - Chicken wire covers or cloches
  - Cover planting with egg crate
  - Grow vining plants on trellises (can be harder for birds to access)
  - Place pruned branches around young plants

## Deer:

- Typical signs: plants eaten down to the ground, stems remaining, round droppings nearby
- Favorite plants: beans, beets, cabbage family crops, carrots, lettuce, peas (note: they don't like prickly squash leaves and stems or strongly-scented plants such as onions, garlic, herbs)
- Repel them:
  - Organic animal repellents (check the label)
  - Hang bars of deodorant soaps nearby
  - Ultrasonic animal repellent (emits high-pitched sounds, battery- or solar-powered, some have flashing lights)
- Scare them:
  - Monofilament line across paths they frequent
  - Motion-activated sprinklers (adjustable, shoots water when motion detected)
  - Place windchimes over gate openings
- Create a barrier:
  - Floating row cover over crop you're trying to protect
  - Short, double fences (deer can't jump high and wide at the same time)
  - Barriers inside gate openings during fall and winter
  - Short fences with beds close inside (they aren't sure if they can land safely inside)
  - Regular fencing (solid or wire) – needs to be 7' high at minimum
  - Electric fences

## Raccoons:

- Typical signs: 5-toed pawprints, cornstalks knocked over, partially eaten corn, disturbed compost pile, empty birdfeeders
- Favorite plants: beans, corn, melons, peas, potatoes, squash
- Repel them:
  - Organic animal repellent
  - Ultrasonic animal repellent
- Scare them:
  - Place a radio in your garden (but be considerate of your neighbors!)
  - Motion-activated sprinkler
  - Motion-activated light
  - Pinwheels (iffy)
- Create a barrier:
  - Remove or secure whatever is attracting them
  - Use closed composting system
  - Install a sturdy wire around your garden
  - Block access to potential dens (under buildings)
  - Secure trash can lids
- Other strategies:
  - Never intentionally feed raccoons
  - Use a game camera to determine if raccoons are the problem
  - Don't leave pet food out at night
  - Remove birdfeeders if they're eating the seeds

## Tree Squirrels:

- Typical signs: shallow holes in lawn, garden, vegetables partially eaten, chewed seedlings, bulbs dug up
- Favorite plants: corn, tomatoes, other vegetables

- NOTE: Squirrels are extremely hard to control!
  - Repel them:
    - Interplant with aromatic herbs, marigolds, garlic, onions
    - Organic animal repellent
    - Ultrasonic animal repellent
  - Scare them:
    - Motion-activated sprinkler
    - Mylar balloons near plants they're attracted to
    - Dogs love to chase squirrels!
  - Create a barrier:
    - Trim shrubs and trees near your home
    - Place wide metal baffles on tree trunks
    - Secure potential access points on your home: attics, roof vents, dryer vents
    - Use wire cages or cloches to protect crops
    - Floating row cover with edges weighed down
    - Consider "squirrel-proof" bird feeders – hang them away from trees and home
  - Other strategies:
    - Never intentionally feed squirrels
    - Don't feed pets outdoors
    - Harvest vegetables promptly
    - Clean up crop debris, especially fruits and nuts
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**More about Susan...** Susan Mulvihill is the longtime Sunday garden columnist for The Spokesman-Review newspaper in Spokane, Wash. In addition to the books below, she is also co-author of [Northwest Gardener's Handbook](#) and has been a Spokane County Master Gardener for 21 years. Her YouTube channel has over 400 videos on a wide range of gardening topics. Susan's goals are to get everyone to grow a vegetable garden and to use organic methods.

### **Connect with Susan!**

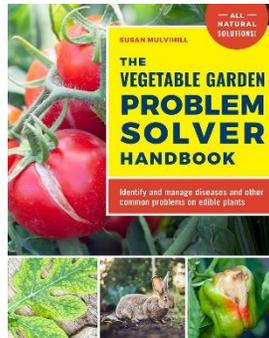
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### **The Vegetable Garden Problem Solver Handbook**, Cool Springs Press, 2023

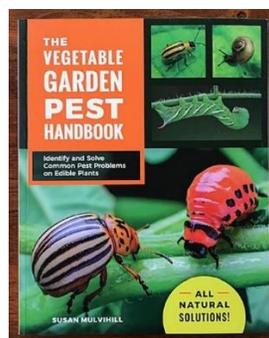


Susan's newest book covers how to keep your vegetable plants healthy and productive; how to deal with plant disorders such as blossom-end rot and fruit-cracking; how to identify and deal with vegetable plant diseases organically; and strategies for keeping commonly-encountered critters away from your veggies. The information is geared toward gardeners of all levels so they can be successful at growing vegetables.

Get your signed copy after my talk or send me an email ([Susan@SusansintheGarden.com](mailto:Susan@SusansintheGarden.com))!

### **The Vegetable Garden Pest Handbook**

Cool Springs Press, 2021



Your complete, easy-to-use guide to the most commonly-encountered vegetable garden pests! Learn about their life cycles, what they look like (over 200 photos!), which crops they bother, what their damage looks like, and choose organic products and strategies to control them. Discover which bugs are beneficial, which pests they prey upon, and how to attract more of these good guys to your garden. Pick helpful do-it-yourself projects to make traps, barriers, and even an insect hotel to attract the good bugs! Get your signed copy after my talk or send me an email ([Susan@SusansintheGarden.com](mailto:Susan@SusansintheGarden.com))!