

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
 - If scaring or repelling critters, put the method in place BEFORE they discover ripe fruits, etc.
- Know your laws
 - Contact your local Fish & Wildlife Dept.
 - 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

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: both are iffy but move them around frequently
 - Pinwheels, hang up CDs, attach mylar tape or ribbon (some "buzz")
 - 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

Gophers:

- Typical signs: mounds of soil, plants leaning in their holes, plants missing roots
- Favorite plants: all vegetables but mainly root crops such as carrots, parsnips and turnips
- Repel them:
 - Organic animal repellents (check the label)
- Create a barrier:
 - Cover bottom of raised bed with hardware cloth or 1" chicken wire
- Other strategies:
 - Trap them if it's legal in your state
 - Let predators (hawks, owls, snakes) do their thing
 - Don't use poison because it will in turn poison the predators
 - Don't try to flood them out (their tunnel system is too extensive for it to be effective plus it wastes water)

Moles:

- Typical signs: conical molehills on lawn or soil, disturbed plant roots
- Favorite plants: None! They are carnivorous but they can damage plant roots while tunneling
- Repel them:
 - Mole repellents that contain castor oil are effective, but can't use near edible crops
- Create a barrier:
 - Place a wire barrier around the area you're trying to protect
 - Mole traps are effective – only set in active tunnels (bury 2' deep + 6" above soil level)



Rabbits:

- Typical signs: Plants disappear overnight, foliage clipped off plants, brown pea-sized droppings
- Favorite plants: Beans, beets, broccoli, carrots, lettuce, peas, sweet peppers
- Repel them: organic rabbit repellents (check the label), deodorant soap nearby, interplant with onions, herbs
- Scare them: pinwheels, motion-activated sprinkler
- Create a barrier: bird netting on hoops over crop (weigh down perimeter), chicken wire cages, chicken wire around garden (2' tall + 6" underground), grow in tall galvanized raised beds, electric fence netting

Raccoons:

- NOTE: Raccoons are carriers of rabies, distemper and roundworms
- 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:

- NOTE: Squirrels are extremely hard to control and carry rabies, fleas, mites, parasites
- Typical signs: shallow holes in lawn, garden, vegetables partially eaten, chewed seedlings, bulbs dug up
- Favorite plants: corn, tomatoes, other vegetables
- 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

Voles, Meadow

- Typical signs: Runways through lawn or garden, holes with clipped grass around entrance, plant damage near soil level, girdled plants, plants fall over
- Favorite plants: Artichokes, beets, cabbage family crops, carrots, celery, lettuce, onions, potatoes, spinach, tomatoes
- Repel them: Repellents with castor oil (not near edibles), organic animal repellents
- Create a barrier: Low barriers around plants you want to protect (1/4" wire: 12" above, 10" below surface)
- Other strategies: Keep grass short to discourage voles, snap traps work, let natural predators help, don't use poison

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!

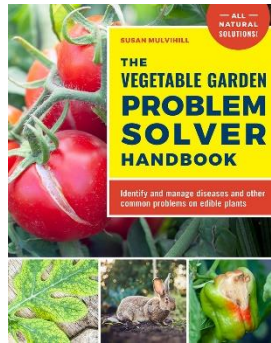
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The Vegetable Garden Problem Solver Handbook, Cool Springs Press, 2023

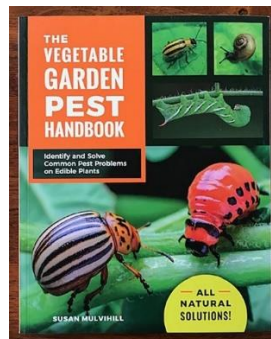


Susan's newest book covers how to keep your vegetable plants healthy and productive; how to deal with plant disorders such as blossom-end rot and fruit-cracking; how to identify and deal with vegetable plant diseases organically; and strategies for keeping commonly-encountered critters away from your 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)!

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!

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