

I moved to a rural area this year so we can have a big vegetable garden, but I am ready to give up! Everything I planted has been eaten or destroyed. Travis, Paso Robles.

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Keeping your vegetables, flowers or other perennials safe from vertebrates, large or small, can be a challenge. Exclusion in the form of a fence is a great way to keep animals like deer, pigs, and rabbits at bay. The fence should be up to 12 feet tall, “non-climb” wire with the bottom partly buried so animals cannot dig under. If a permanent fence is not possible, protect areas that are animal favorites; for example, rosebushes. These areas can be fenced in with a few bamboo stakes and chicken wire. Another option often seen with sheep and poultry are electric woven fences which you can move around your property as needed (great for raccoons and possums).

Fruit trees are in danger of four-legged or feathered thieves once fruit has set. An inexpensive netting will save your harvest. If you are establishing a new perennial garden, you might have to protect young plantings for 1 to 2 years with fencing or netting. If you have neighbors, ask them which of their landscape plants are thriving and learn from their successes.

Once the browsing animals are kept off the sensitive areas, let’s talk about burrowing vertebrates. Gophers and squirrels come to mind. Trapping is the best way to slowly but surely rid your property of these pests. If you are not up to the task, ask friends or neighbors for help. If gophers are abundant, invest in some materials and plant your veggies in raised beds lined with gopher wire and use gopher baskets when planting perennials and trees. Squirrels hide in brush piles, rocks etc., so eliminate these nesting sites. Enlist the help of natural predators in your rural area by establishing owl and raptor boxes. All these projects are perfect for the fall and winter months so come springtime, the only one enjoying the fruits of your labor will be you and yours!