

RABBIT RESISTANT PLANTS

by TOM SUBRANNI, Chairman of the Longport Green Team and the Longport Public Library

WELCOME TO OUR LITTLE TALK ON THE TIMELY SUBJECT OF PROTECTING OUR PLANTS FROM OUR LONGPORT RABBITS.

RATHER THAN ADDRESS THE RABBIT POPULATION DIRECTLY, THIS TALK WILL FOCUS HOW TO MITIGATE THE RABBIT DAMAGE TO OUR DEAR PLANTS.

WE ARE PROUD OF OUR RABBITS. THEY ARE THE MOST LOVABLE AND INTELLIGENT RABBITS ON THE ISLAND.

SADLY, THEY ARE ALSO THE MOST RAVENOUS DESTROYERS OF OUR BEAUTIFUL AND EXPENSIVE FLOWERS WHICH SIGNIFICANTLY ENHANCE THE BEAUTY OF LONGPORT.

WOULD YOU CALL THIS A LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP?

UNFORTUNATELY, RABBITS WILL EAT JUST ABOUT ANYTHING, IF HUNGRY ENOUGH, SO THE ADVICE YOU HEAR TODAY ABOUT RABBIT PROOF AND RABBIT RESISTANT PLANTS IS SUBJECT TO THAT REALITY.

FORTUNATELY FOR US, PLANTS HAVE FOUR CATEGORIES OF DEFENSE MECHANISMS, DEVELOPED OVER MILLIONS OF YEARS TO WARD OFF HERBIVORES:

- (1) PLANT TOXINS
- (2) PLANT THORNS
- (3) PLANT TASTE
- (4) PLANT TEXTURE.

PLANT TOXINS: RABBITS AVOID PLANTS WITH TOXINS KNOWN AS ALKALOIDS AND OTHER CHEMICALS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH SAPPY OR OOZING STEMS. PLANTS HAVE VARYING STRENGTH TOXINS.

PLANT THORNS: RABBITS AVOID PLANTS THAT HAVE DEVELOPED MECHANICAL DEFENSE MECHANISMS SUCH AS SHARP THORNS. THE LONGPORT YUCCA IS AN EXAMPLE OF RABBIT PROOF PLANT WITH ITS JAGGED, PRICKLY AND SPIKY LEAVES.

PLANT TASTE(Aroma): RABBITS AVOID PLANTS THAT OFFER BITTER OR AROMATIC LEAVES, SUCH AS LAVENDER, AND CHAMOMILE.

PLANT TEXTURE: RABBITS AVOID PLANTS HAVING HAIRY, WOOLY OR CACTUS-LIKE LEAVES, SUCH AS THE RABBIT PROOF PORTULACA

UNFORTUNATELY, RABBITS WILL TOTALLY AVOID CERTAIN PLANTS SOME YEARS AND JOYFULLY CONSUME THEM IN OTHERS, JUST AS IF THEY PREFERRED A VARIETY IN THEIR DIET. PERHAPS, YOUNG INEXPERIENCED RABBITS ACQUIRE TASTES THAT THEIR ANCESTORS ESCHEWED. ALSO, YOUNG RABBITS ARE CURIOUS AND TEND TO SAMPLE MANY PLANTS, EVEN ONES REPUTED TO BE RABBIT RESISTANT. ALL RABBITS PREFER YOUNG, TENDER SHOOTS, EVEN IF THE SAME MATURE PLANT IS RABBIT RESISTANT.

GARDENERS SHOULD EXPERIMENT WITH PLANTS. PLANT TWO OR THREE PLANTS HAVING DEFENSE CHARACTERISTICS AND PROTECT ONE OR TWO WITH CHICKEN WIRE. IF RABBITS DO NOT ATTACK THE UNPROTECTED ONE, YOU DISCOVERED A RABBIT RESISTANT PLANT – AT LEAST FOR THE CURRENT YEAR. PROFESSIONAL LANDSCAPERS ROUTINELY PLANT A CULTIVAR TO “TEST THE WATERS.”

THE FOLLOWING IS A SHORT LIST OF RABBIT PROOF AND RABBIT RESISTANT PLANTS.

NOTE: AN ASTERISK DENOTES RABBIT PROOF PLANTS GLEANED FROM MY 40 YEARS OF PERSONAL GARDENING EXPERIENCE IN LONGPORT. A NAMED PLANT WITH NO ASTERISK DENOTES REPORTEDLY RABBIT RESISTANT.

- ALLIUMS - ORNAMENTAL ONION-Taste
- ANEMONE
- ARTEMISIA
- ASTILBE – TASTE
- *BASIL – TASTE
- BUTTERFLY BUSH
- *BARBERRY BUSH – NEEDLE SHARP THORNS AND BARBARINE TOXIN
- *CALADIUMS-TEXTURE
- CATMINT – TASTE
- *CHAMOMILE-TASTE

- CHRYSANTHEMUM – TOXIN – HIGH LEVELS OF PYRETHRINS, A COMMON INGREDIENT IN
 - INSECTICIDES.
- COREOPSIS-DAISY-TOXIN
- DAFFODILS – TOXIN
- FOXGLOVE (DIGITALIS) – HIGHLY TOXIC – KNOWN AT “DEAD MAN’S BELLS.”
- *GARDENIA – TASTE
- *GERANIUMS – AROMATIC
- *HYDRANGEA
- LANTANA – RABBITS SOMETIMES CHANGE THEIR DIET AND EAT THIS PLANT.
- *LAVENDER – AROMATIC
- *NIGHTSHADE PLANTS (INCLUDING TOMATOES AND EGGPLANT) – TOXINS – AMYGDALION
 - WHICH BREAKS DOWN TO PRODUCE CYANIDE. TOMATO LEAVES CONTAIN SOLANINES.
- ORNAMENTAL PEPPER – TASTE
- *PORTULACA – CACTUS-LIKE SUCCULENT LEAVES AND STEMS
- RHODODENDRONS
- *SAGE AND RUSSIAN SAGE - AROMATIC
- *SALVIA – TASTE
- *SEDUMS - CACTUS-LIKE SUCCULENT LEAVES AND STEMS
- SMOKE BUSH
- SPURGE
- *VINCA – TOXINS AND LEATHERY LEAVES-TEXTURE
- WAX BEGONIA
- WOLFSBANE – TOXIC AND ALL PLANTS ENDING IN “BANE.”
- YARROW - AROMATIC
- YARROW – AROMATIC LEAVES
- YELLOW IRISES – HIGHLY TOXIC
- ZINNIAS

MANY LONGPORT RESIDENTS EMPLOY PROFESSIONAL LANDSCAPE COMPANIES WHO ARE UP-TO-DATE ON THE LATEST RABBIT DIET. A CONSULTATION FOR NEXT YEAR’S PLANTINGS, OR THIS SEASON’S REPLANTINGS WOULD HELP IN SAVING FLOWERS AND FOLIAGE PLANTS, AND WELL AS THE ATTENDANT COST.

BE SUSTAINABLE – TOM SUBRANNI, GREEN TEAM LEADER