

GUARANTEED LIVE RABBIT TRAP

OR

HOW TO PROTECT NEWLY PLANTED TREE SEEDLINGS

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If you have ever planted a CRP field, Christmas Trees, nursery stock, or reforested a bottom land field, etc., you know the frustration of finding many of the trees bitten and lying on the ground. Rabbits generally do not eat the trees, just cut them off and leave them. Certain species are more vulnerable since rabbits seem to go right to tulip poplar or white pine, for example.

We started in the Christmas Tree business on one of our eight Tree Farms in 1968 and just completed our 40th year. To plant a 20 cent seedling then sell a \$30.00 (or more) Christmas Tree eight years later is a good deal, if you like to work. But what if you and your crew plant trees all day, come back the next day for more “fun” planting and discover many rows of cut off seedlings lying uneaten on the ground? What a way to start a day!

We and our crews passed the five-million seedlings planted mark over 20 years ago. Many of the jobs had survival guarantees in the contract. Tree survival is the bottom line in measuring success of a planting job. Meeting survival guarantees can be the difference between profit and loss, and rabbit damage affects seedling survival. What can be done about rabbit damage/seedling survival?

I will guarantee that legal hunting will not get all the rabbits. If you want to catch all the rabbits and reduce rabbit damage to zero, please read on. The following method will work—guaranteed. What does this guarantee mean? It means after trapping you go out three days after a snow and find no rabbit tracks.

I set out a number of live rabbit traps (plans attached) in the weeds and brush around my planting site. It is best to hunt the area during the winter hunting season prior to planting. Then set out the traps in late winter/early spring, preferably prior to planting. Ideally, the rabbits will be gone before planting. I prop open the trap door with a stiff weed or small stick cut to length. Do not bait the trap. Baiting the trap will attract opossums, raccoons, dogs, coyotes, etc., all wanting a meal in midwinter. In trying to get into the trap to get at the bait, they set it off, and you catch nothing. With the traps set, nothing happens if the weather is good. Then a storm moves in and a wet snow or drizzly, wet, rainy day or two comes along, when it is not fit to be out, and every rabbit in the area looks for a dry den area to hole up in. Often the rabbit traps are the only dry places around. Check the traps daily in such weather. All my caught rabbits were released a few miles away in perfect habitat where a group of us loved to rabbit hunt. I will leave it to you as to how to properly dispose of the rabbits.

One suggestion of a small change to the plans to build the traps easier: On the swinging door, all we would do is drill a hole through the wall into the side of the door and drive in a small nail to let the door swing. It was much faster, easier, and it worked. The first traps I borrowed were dark green and they worked. Whether one color is better than another, I don't know. Another suggestion: Contact your local Boy Scout office for troops in your area who may be interested in this project. In my case, I bought the materials and

hired a Scout Troop to build the traps. Many a Scout earned a Merit Badge on this project, which was a win-win for all concerned.

Good trapping and good luck with tree planting.

Nov. '98