

# Cottontail rabbits hop along happily

*They are one of easiest mammals to manage; just make sure of habitat diversity*

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Cottontail rabbits are found throughout most of Alabama and are considered one of the easiest mammals to manage. Two keys to successful cottontail management are habitat diversity and interspersion. Interspersion is the mixing of habitat types that are key to successful cottontail populations.

The rabbit is primarily known as an "edge" species. An edge species prefers the area where two or more different habitat types meet. The area where a field and forest meet creates a habitat edge. Cottontails are extremely edge-dependent animals. Because of this, several small areas or patches of food and cover are much more beneficial than one large area containing food and cover. Multiple small areas provide more edge than one large area. When adequate amounts of quality food and

cover exist, cottontail populations are very successful.

Areas that provide adequate cover may include brushy fencerows, thickets, hayfields, wetland edges, young pine stands, thinned mature pine stands and ditch banks. The existence (or lack) of good cover may be the greatest single factor that can affect rabbit populations. Good cover provides escape areas from predators, areas to feed and nest, and protection from severe weather, especially in the winter.

Brush piles are effective in providing good cover. In addition to providing excellent escape cover, brush piles provide thermal protection during cold weather. Constructing brush piles is relatively simple. The best brush piles are usually about five feet high, 15 feet wide and

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A cottontail rabbit takes a moment to relax and enjoy a snack.

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