

# Garden Fruit Trees & Wildlife



With our ever-changing urban landscape native wildlife have been adapting, and to some extent becoming dependent on flowering and fruiting trees grown in our backyards. Drought, tree clearing and the further loss of forested areas within our cities make the tended backyard fruit trees a prime food source for birds, possums and flying-foxes. Many people are happy to share their fruit with wildlife but for those who really want to eat the fruits of their labour there are ways to protect crops in a wildlife friendly manner.

RSPCA Queensland is keen to promote awareness of wildlife entanglement, especially in inappropriately erected bird exclusion netting. RSPCA Queensland rescues about 4000 individual wildlife animals each year and some of these include flying-foxes, birds and snakes that are tangled in netting (an exact number is not available).



## GUIDELINES

- **NEVER** buy the thin nylon monofilament netting sold by most hardware stores. This has to be the deadliest and cruellest netting available and is responsible for hundreds of deaths of flying-foxes and other wildlife annually. Thrown loosely over a tree it has the potential to cause horrific injuries. Loose netting traps animals so completely that it cuts off circulation, causes bruising, breaks bones and cuts into the skin creating horrible wounds. If rescued before death many animal carers and wildlife groups report that animals are often hurt so badly that they have to be euthanased.
- **The bounce test.** Animals must be able to 'bounce off' the netting if they land on it. As some of our wildlife can be fairly boisterous when jumping or landing on the net it needs to be able to withstand their weight. Did you know a common brushtail possum could weigh up to 4.5kg and flying-foxes up to 1kg? For the netting to be effective it must be tensioned enough to stop folds forming around the animal when it lands on or crawls over the net. Ideally a flying-fox should almost bounce off the netting rather than sink into it when it lands. Remember that nocturnal animals cannot see dark coloured net so always buy white or light colours.

### Paper Bags Tied Over The Fruit

A wildlife friendly deterrent is to tie paper bags over the fruit you can reach, and then unreachable fruit can be left for the wildlife. The fruit will still ripen but you may need to change the bags if ripped or damaged by rain.



### 30% Shade Cloth

Proven to be effective and with no harm to wildlife, 30% shade cloth (fine weave) can be an easy, temporary and inexpensive deterrent for flying-foxes landing on your tree. Throw a hemmed piece of shade cloth (no frayed edges) over the tree and peg it into place with clothes pegs. It can be folded and put away after use.



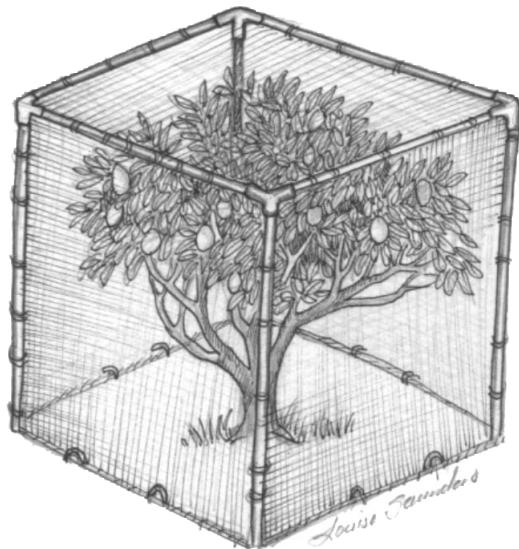
*(It is important that in the above two methods no loose string or frayed edges will entangle wildlife.)*

**EXCLUSION NETTING** has proven to increase fruit yields in commercial crops, protects it from hail and wind and guards against foraging wildlife.

Netting always poses a risk to wildlife so think carefully before you use it. Unless constructed properly and with the appropriate sort of netting it will become a death trap. Any netting regardless of size or weight has the potential to harm wildlife unless it is stretched as taut as possible and is enclosed all the way to the ground excluding animals from climbing up inside. Even then some animals or birds may be caught.

### **Home-made Framed Enclosure THE PREFERRED NETTING OPTION**

A frame can be made from PVC pipe, metal or timber. Leave at least one metre clearance around the tree. Stretch knitted bird/bat netting with a mesh size 40mm or smaller over the frame, a simple overlapping of netting, fastened with a tomato stake, to enable the owner access for new growth, pruning and fruit picking. Star pickets driven into the ground can be used to hold the frame securely to the ground.



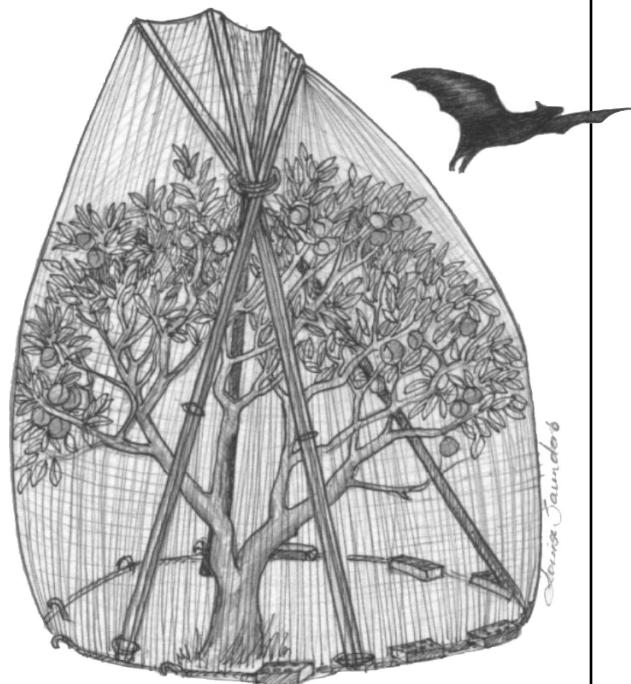
It is the property owner's responsibility to net their tree properly. You may be liable to prosecution if your trees are netted in such a way that they cause harm to wildlife.

Please check your trees daily. If, despite your precautions, a flying-fox should inadvertently be caught in your netting **PLEASE DO NOT ATTEMPT TO FREE THE ANIMAL YOURSELF**. It may become stressed and frightened, increasing the risk of being bitten or scratched, as with any wild animal. Throw a towel over the animal to calm it down then call your local Wildlife Group, Veterinarian or Government Wildlife Services.

A small number of Flying-foxes have the potential to be infected with Australian Bat Lyssavirus; only vaccinated wildlife carers should ever handle bats or flying-foxes as they have the skills to free the animal and determine whether it needs veterinary attention. Always seek professional help.

### **Teepee Style**

Using several tall garden stakes it is possible to hoist netting over your tree and then pull it down tightly to the ground and secure it firmly. It is important that any loose net is firmly pulled to avoid entrapment.



If you are bitten or scratched, Queensland Health recommends you wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water for five minutes, then contact your Hospital Emergency Department or the Health Department immediately.

Flying-foxes play an essential role in seed dispersal and in the pollination of plants keeping our forests genetically healthy. The Grey-headed Flying-fox is listed as vulnerable under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. Due to a rapid population decline over the past 20 years it is important to minimise the risk of harm to this important animal.

Wildlife care organisations are always looking for new carers to help look after injured and orphaned wildlife. If you are interested in this rewarding task contact your State Wildlife Services for a wildlife organisation nearest to you.

Environmental Protection Agency South-East Queensland Hotline – 1300 130 372

RSPCA Brisbane Queensland – (07) 3426 9999

For more information on these subjects visit [www.epa.qld.gov.au](http://www.epa.qld.gov.au)