

Deer In The Garden

Many people enjoy seeing deer in their garden. If you have vegetation that deer like and you live in or near deer habitat, these elegant wild creatures will frequent your property. The easiest way to live among deer and preserve your landscaping is to choose plants that deer don't like, although deer may eat even some of those plants if they are hungry enough. If your garden consists of vegetation that attracts deer and deer are around, you can expect them to browse in it.

In addition to choosing plants that deer don't like, most troubling situations with deer in your garden can be prevented by installing fencing and/or using repellents. Fencing works best if you have *heavy* unwanted foraging by deer. Repellents may suffice if the unwanted foraging is *low* to *moderate*. Keep in mind that food preferences of deer vary according to geographical area, season, and availability of food. If a portion of your landscaping contains plants that deer find tasty, you may need to protect that particular part of your landscape.

Deer-resistant plants: Consult the *Sunset Western Garden Book*, a garden book appropriate for your geographical area, or your local nursery for a detailed list of deer-resistant plants. Garden stores and your local Cooperative Extension Service may also know what plants are resistant to deer in your area. Each county in the United States has an Extension Office staffed with agents who work with university-based Extension specialists to answer questions about gardening, agriculture, and pest control. Find the phone number of the Extension office in your county in the local government section of your telephone directory or here:

<http://npic.orst.edu/pest/countyext.htm>

A former coordinator for the Master Gardener Program in the San Francisco Bay Area says that deer won't touch plants in the mint family and the lavender family.

Fencing: If you want to keep a specific section of your garden or certain trees completely off limits to deer, erect a deer-proof small

gauge woven wire or solid wooden fence at least 8-10 feet high around it. The fence will last for many years and be worth the initial expense. You may wish to bury an additional 6-12" of the fence underground to prevent fawns from crawling underneath and to keep out other animals who might dig under it. Make sure that there are no openings in the fence. One desperate resident reported that a mother deer had cleared the top of his fence, which was less than 8 feet. Her fawn tried to follow her by squeezing through a small opening near the ground. Once its head was through the opening, the fawn became stuck. Fortunately, it was freed eventually.

Never install a wrought iron fence with spikes on top. Deer can become impaled on the spikes when trying to clear the fence. Wrought iron fences even without spikes can be hazardous to fawns. When fawns are small, they can slip easily through the openings. As they grow larger they are still able to compress their rib cages and squeeze through the 5 or 6-inch gaps in wrought iron fences but are stopped by their hips. When they try to back up, their rib cage expands and locks them in place. Stop fawns from passing through by tacking onto the lower part of the 8-10 foot fence an attractive 3-foot high small gauge wire mesh that is the same color as the wrought iron.

Repellents: You may wish to use non-toxic deer repellents with a smell or taste that is offensive to deer. In order to be effective, repellents need to be applied regularly every 3-4 weeks, after rains, and on new growth as the plants grow. The Humane Society of the United States advises that repellents with putrid odors such as the sulphur-based odor of rotten eggs seem to be more successful than taste-based repellents.

Various combinations of both aversive tastes and odors have proven to be effective. One very simple, odoriferous repellent is a bar of Irish Spring Soap. Leave the wrapper on and drill a hole through the center of each bar. Run a string through the hole in each bar. Then hang each individual string with its bar of soap on bushes and trees 3 feet apart up to a height of 6'. You can also shred Irish Spring Soap and scatter it throughout your garden. Mesh bags filled with fresh garlic

can also be hung from trees. Recipes and ideas for homemade repellents are available from the Humane Society of the United States at

http://www.humaneociety.org/animals/deer/tips/solving_problems_deer.html#Repellents

and in the book, *Living with Wildlife* by The California Center for Wildlife.

Motion sensors: Motion sensors that emit light or squirt water can also discourage deer. Forceful squirts of water from the motion-activated Scarecrow (www.scatmat.com) that is found in local hardware stores and attaches to a hose can discourage deer and other wildlife visitors. The most active browse times for deer are early morning, dusk into evening, and moonlit nights. Activate the squirting sprinkler only during the hours that deer frequent the garden. Otherwise, people, birds, and other wildlife passing by will be sprayed.

No bird netting: Black plastic “bird netting” that is advertised as a bird repellent is *not* recommended to repel either deer or birds. Animals can become tangled in bird netting placed over trees and plants. Imagine how difficult it would be to free terrified skunks, raccoons, birds, and other wildlife that can get caught in bird netting.

Fawns: If you come upon an uninjured fawn do not touch it. Its mother is probably browsing nearby. An uninjured fawn that is lying flat in the grass may be following its instinct to hide from predators while it waits for its mother to return. Unless a fawn is in obvious danger, leave it alone and go away so its mother will feel it is safe to return.

Strategies to repel deer tend to be most successful if they are used when deer damage first occurs. Implementing several tactics at the same time may also be more successful than trying just one at a time.

Folks who live in deer habitat can enjoy visits from deer if they share some of their vegetation with them and protect the plants they value most. If you have additional questions concerning deer in your garden, contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center. To find a nearby rehabilitation center click on:

<http://www.nwrawildlife.org/content/finding-rehabilitator>

or consult *Living With Wildlife* by Diana Landau *et al*, Sierra Club Books.

Information courtesy of www.creativecrittersolutions.org