

Deer Management

To manage deer on your property, you must first survey your land. What conditions favor or discourage deer? Where do they spend the winter? What and where are they eating? What aesthetic and economic conditions affect how much damage from deer can be tolerated?

In many areas, deer have become a problem when increasing development reduces the habitat size available to them. When deer are forced to live with more limited resources, they tend to strip vegetation and damage crops or landscaped trees and shrubs. In suburban areas, deer have few predators to reduce their numbers.

Striking a balance between deer and human needs is often the most effective way to manage deer. In recent years, landscape managers have used a variety of techniques to reduce deer damage.



*Determining what conditions on your property favor or discourage deer can lead you to an effective management plan for them.
Photo: Prairie Dune Golf Course, Kansas.*



Rhododendron plants are distasteful to deer.

Control Methods

Repellants

A variety of taste and scent repellants that contain the active agent *thiram* are commercially available. You can check with your local nursery for products recommended for your area. Other repellants can include coyote urine and certain handsoaps. Also, there are devices on the market to repel deer with ultrasonic noise.

Landscape Plants

Though deer eat a varied diet, they do have food preferences and dislikes. Avoid plants that have been eaten in the past and interplant species that deter deer when possible. Good examples of plants deer stay clear of are Blacked-Eyed Susans, Daffodils, Lavender and Rhododendron.



*Deer can cause problems for golf courses by damaging turf and eating native vegetation.
Photo: Kingwood Country Club, Texas*

To avoid having deer eat your garden...

There is a great variety of plants that deer find distasteful, such as lilacs, rhododendrons, and sunflowers, that can be found by consulting your local garden store or library. Deer dislike plants with gray foliage, such as lamb's ear, artemisia, and mountain bluets. Ferns, herbs, and mints are also passed up by deer.

Barriers

Valuable trees and gardens can be protected with an assortment of fences and aviary netting. Electric fences around plant nurseries, welded wire fences around some free standing trees, and plastic fencing in some wooded areas can be effective. Since deer can leap 8 1/2 feet, fences must be high to prohibit them from jumping over. Tree guards can be placed around vulnerable trees and shrubs. Deer prefer young plants and new growth, but in winter will eat more mature browse and even strip bark from young trees.

Predators

In some areas, natural predators, such as coyotes and wolves, can be encouraged by habitat management. This works best in rural areas where these predators have space to safely roam. Dogs may help to scare away deer, but they need to be on the property during peak feeding hours of dawn, dusk and early evening.

Intervention

When other control methods have failed, local authorities should be contacted to help you deal with deer. Your local state wildlife department (could be named Fish & Wildlife, Environmental Conservation, Natural Resources, or another similar name) can help you determine the best method of intervention. This may include hunting. Carefully consider taking educational measures to inform neighbors or the general public of your plans prior to initiating a hunting program. Not only can you pay large fines for improper hunting, but the resulting negative publicity can be devastating.

However, if you want to attract deer...

Attracting deer is easy if you live near their natural habitat. If they don't come already, you can create a feeding garden. Plant native vegetation, such as wildflowers and grasses, or vegetables such as peas and corn.