

Community Forestry Assistant



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Oh Deer!

Although browsing deer are charming to watch, they can cause extensive damage by feeding on plants and rubbing antlers against trees. In urban areas, home landscapes may become the major source of food. Deer can pose a serious aesthetic and economic threat. Damage is most commonly noticed in spring on new, succulent growth. Because deer lack upper incisors, browsed twigs and stems show a rough, shredded surface. Damage caused by rabbits, on the other hand, has a neat, sharp 45-degree cut. Rodents leave narrow teeth marks when feeding on branches. Deer strip the bark and leave no teeth marks.

It is difficult to move deer out of areas where they are not wanted. Not all strategies are practical for every homeowner. Frightening deer with gas exploders, strobe lights, pyrotechnics or tethered dogs typically provides only temporary relief. More practical management strategies include selecting plants unattractive to deer, treating plants with deer repellents, netting and tubing, and fencing.



The placement of plants in part determines the extent of damage. Plant more susceptible species near the home, in a fenced area, or inside a protective ring of less-preferred species. A hungry deer will find almost any plant palatable, so no plant is "deer proof."

Repellents

There are two types of deer repellents: contact repellents and area repellents. Contact repellents are applied directly to plants, causing them to taste bad. Area repellents are placed in a problem area and repel by their foul odor. Repellents are generally more effective on less preferred plants.

Apply repellents on a dry day with temperatures above freezing. Treat young trees completely. Older trees may be treated only on their new growth. Treat to a height 6 feet above the maximum expected snow depth. Deer browse from the top down. Hang or apply repellents at the bud or new growth level of the plants you wish to protect.

A spray of 20 percent whole eggs and 80 percent water is one of the most effective repellents. To prevent the sprayer from clogging, remove the chalaza or white membrane attached to the yolk before mixing the eggs. The egg mixture is weather resistant but must be reapplied about every 30 days. Other home-remedy repellents are questionable at best.

Netting and Tubing

Tubes of Vexar netting around individual seedlings are an effective method to reduce deer damage to small trees. The material degrades in sunlight and breaks down in three to five years. These tubes can protect just the growing terminals or can completely enclose small trees. Attach tubes to a support stake to keep them upright. Another option is flexible, sunlight-degradable netting that expands to slip over seedlings.

Tubes or large stakes placed around the trunks of saplings or larger trees will help prevent damage to the trunk by either browsing or buck rubs.

Fencing

Adequate fencing to exclude deer is the only sure way to control deer damage; however, this may not be an acceptable option in the urban environment. The conventional deer-proof fence is 8 feet high and made of woven wire. Additional options include invisible mesh barriers, slanting deer fences, and electric fences.

Plants' Relative Susceptibility to Deer Browsing

Often Browsed	Sometimes Browsed	Rarely Browsed
Apples	Alder	Barberry
Aspen	Golden currant	Blue mist spiraea
Mugo pine	Mountain maple	Common juniper
Rocky Mountain juniper	Ninebark	Douglas-fir
Roses (most)	Oregon grape	Hawthorn
Wild red raspberry	Wild plum	Mountain mahogany
		Oregon grape
		Flowering & Korean Dogwood
		Black, Red & Scotts Pine
		Norway, White & Blue Spruce
		Viburnum
		Rabbit brush

A comprehensive list of deer resistant species is available at http://www.twomblynursery.com/resource_deer.htm.

This article has been adapted from "Preventing Deer Damage" published by the Colorado State University Extension in April 2008.