

# Dealing with Deer in the Landscape

Resource: UMN Extension

3352 N Service Dr.  
Red Wing, MN 55066  
[www.sargentsnursery.com](http://www.sargentsnursery.com)  
P: 651-388-3847  
E: [sargents@sargentsnursery.com](mailto:sargents@sargentsnursery.com)



Deer damage home landscapes by feeding on garden and landscape plants, rubbing their antlers against trees, or scraping the soil around trees. In urban environments where native plants and alfalfa, corn and grains are not available, the home landscape may become the major source of food. In areas where deer are a problem, there are several options. You can reduce damage to the home landscape by growing plants which deer find unattractive (See List Below), fencing the deer out, or using repellents.

It should be stressed that hungry deer will eat almost anything. Young, tender plants are generally more likely to be damaged than older, tougher plants. Don't mix plants deer prefer among those they dislike. They'll trample the plants they dislike to get to those they prefer. Some information on which plants deer tend to browse has been gathered through the tree nursery industry where deer browsing is of economic importance. Limited information is available on which vegetables or flowers deer like or dislike.

Check with neighbors and friends for their experiences with specific plants. Experiment with different plants and keep records of which ones deer ignore. Plants they usually like may be grown in areas inaccessible to deer. Realize that environmental pressures may cause deer to browse plants they have previously ignored.

Male deer, or bucks, damage young trees by rubbing and scraping against them during the mating season, in an attempt to show their dominance. Rubbing against trees removes the velvet that covers their antlers during the summer. Once this is accomplished, the buck will polish his antlers and continue to mark his territory by thrashing his antlers up and down against tree trunks and branches. This shreds and tears bark and may break branches or the trunk itself. Small, smooth barked trees such as apples are more attractive to bucks as rubbing sites than larger trees and trees with rough bark. Individual trees can be protected against rubbing injury by pounding tall vertical barrier stakes into the soil around each, approx. a foot from the trunk.

Bucks will also paw the soil around trees and urinate on the cleared area beneath an overhanging branch. The buck will chew and rub his scent on the branch, often breaking it. Pruning trees to remove any branches lower than six feet from the ground may help.

## **BARRIERS**

Fences can reduce the number of deer which enter an area, though they're not 100% effective. For a small garden patch, use a four foot high fence, or enclose the area with snow fence, as deer avoid small, penned-in sites.

For a larger lawn or garden, a fence made of wire, not wood, angled away from the yard creates both a psychological and physical barrier. Deer will hesitate to jump over something in which they fear becoming entangled. The fence should be six feet high and have a 30 degree angle to be effective. A fence angled toward the yard is no psychological barrier. Deer will jump a vertical fence eight feet high, particularly if it is made of wood. Electric fencing has

been used with some success in tree nurseries. Strips of aluminum foil smeared with peanut butter affixed to electric fencing lure deer to the fence where they lick the peanut butter and get a shock. Electric fences attached to a higher voltage charger can deter deer as they can hear the hum of the charge through the wires without touching them. However, electric fences may not be suitable for urban uses, especially when children are present.

## **NOISE**

Alarms or other auditory devices are not particularly effective for protecting the home landscape. They are more likely to be found irritating by homeowners and neighbors than by the deer. Auditory alarms and devices such as cannons have been used in tree nurseries to scare deer off, but they quickly become accustomed to the noise.

## **REPELLENTS**

Two basic types of deer repellents are available. Contact repellents are applied to the plants, causing them to taste bad. Area repellents are placed in the problem area and repel due to their foul odor.

Some people have had success with tying pieces of deodorant soap on the branches of trees. A large bar is cut into about six pieces and each piece is placed in a mesh bag and tied to the branches. Non-deodorant soap does not seem to work as well. Two eggs and a cup or two of cold water mixed in a high speed blender, added to a gallon of water and sprayed on the foliage has been effective in some cases. This egg mixture does not wash off the foliage easily but re-application two or three times a season may be needed. (For a larger quantity, blend a dozen eggs into 5 gallons of water.) This mix should be used a distance from the residence as it has an unpleasant odor. It is also thought to repel rabbits.

The following lists attempt to ascribe preference ratings to some common landscape plants.

## **PLANT DEER USUALLY AVOID EATING**

### **Annuals**

Ageratum	French marigolds	Salvia
Amaranth	Globe Amaranth	Signet Marigold
Bachelor Button	Heliotrope	Snapdragon
Begonia (tuberous)	Lantana	Snow on the Mountain/ Euphorbia marginata*
Calendula	Lobelia	Spider Flower/Cleome
Castor Bean	Marigolds	Sweet Alyssum
Celosia (Cockscomb)	Mexican Tulip Poppy/ Golden Cup	Verbena
Chinese Forget-Me-Not	Moss Rose	Wax begonia
Cosmos	Nicotiana	Vinca
Creeping Zinnia	Ornamental Pepper	Zinnia
Cupflower/Nirembergia	Periwinkle	
Dahlia	Polygonum	
Dusty Miller		

**Perennials**

Ajuga/Bugleweed  
Allium  
Amsonia  
Artemesia  
Astilbe  
Baby's-Breath  
Baptisia  
Berginia  
Bleeding-heart  
Butterfly Bush  
Butterfly Weed  
Chysanthemums  
Clematis  
Columbine  
Coralbells  
Coreopsis  
Cranesbill  
Delphinium

Echinacea  
Ferns  
Flax  
Foxglove  
Gas Plant  
Gayfeather/Liatris  
Globe Thistle  
Golden Marguerite  
Joe Pye Weed  
Hakonechloa grass  
Iris  
Lamb's Ears  
Lavender  
Lily of the Valley  
Lungwort  
Lupine  
Maiden Grass  
Mint

Monarda  
Monkshood  
Nepeta  
Obedient plant  
Oriental poppy  
Pachysandra  
Peony  
Plume poppy  
Rose campion  
Russian Sage  
Sage  
Salvia  
Speedwell  
Stachys  
Turtlehead  
Veronica  
Wormwood  
Yarrow/Achillea

**Bulbs**

Daffodils  
Lily of the Valley  
Allium

**Trees & Shrubs**

Barberry  
Bearberry  
Boxwood  
Black chokeberry  
Clethra  
Cotoneaster  
Daphne

Forsythia  
Hawthorn  
Honeysuckle  
Juniper  
Lilac  
Magnolia  
Nannyberry Viburnum

Potentilla  
Rhodedendron  
Smoke Tree  
Sumac  
Tamarix