

Living with Deer

Deer are a fact of life for many of us. They are charming to look at, but they can wreak havoc in the garden. Not only do they browse the plants, but the bucks will quickly destroy a plant when rubbing their antlers during the late summer and autumn rut. How can you garden in deer country?

Build a fence

- The most effective way to garden in deer country is to fence the garden. Ask yourself these questions before fencing your garden:
- Do you need to fence the entire property, or can you just fence a garden area?
- Can you fence young plants temporarily, until they are big enough to withstand some deer damage?
- Are there constraints to fences, such as community regulations against certain types of fencing?
- Is building a fence worth the expense and time?



Antler Damaged Tree

If you decide to build a fence, make sure it is constructed properly. An effective deer fence needs to be at least 8' high if using wire. A board fence that deer cannot see through needs to be at least 5 ½ '-6' high. Also effective is a 4' high, double fence, with 3'-4' in between the fences. A deer will not jump this because there is not enough room between the fences for a safe landing. Electric fences of 8 wires spaced evenly up to 7' also works, but takes more maintenance than a non-electric fence. Gates should be strongly constructed. For a drive through opening, two widths of cattle guard keep deer out as it is too wide to jump.



10' Deer Fence



Cattle Guard Gate

Mini-Fences

Fencing individual plants until they are large enough to tolerate some deer pressure is a common practice. Use 3-4 stakes around the tree to support the fence. It should be at least 5' high. Black, polypropylene deer mesh works well for this. Make sure you can easily open the fence to do any plant maintenance required. Bird netting can also be draped over or around plants as a temporary barrier.



1 Individual Tree Fence

Repellents

Repellents need to be used before the deer have tasted a plant. They also need to be reapplied frequently, and work best if deer pressure is light. Deer can also become accustomed to the same repellent and begin to ignore it, so you may need to change formulas occasionally.

Homemade Deer Repellent

Mix the following in a 1 gallon tank sprayer:
2 beaten and strained eggs (straining keeps the eggs from clogging the sprayer)

1 cup milk, yogurt, buttermilk, or sour milk

2 tsp. Tabasco sauce or cayenne pepper

20 drops essential oil of clove, cinnamon, or eucalyptus

1 tsp. cooking oil or dormant oil

1 tsp. liquid dish soap

Top the tank with water. Shake frequently while

spraying. Apply to dry foliage. Will last 2-4 weeks in dry weather; reapply after rain.

Scare Tactics

Deer can be scared away using scarecrows, bright lights, radios, etc. Unfortunately, they can become accustomed to any tactic used over a period of time. Moving the scare objects frequently can work. One recent innovation is a sprinkler activated by a motion sensor, which also needs to be moved frequently. Dogs are effective at keeping deer out of your yard, if they are in the yard and are active. Using an electric “invisible” fence to keep the dog in the yard is the most effective method.



Ornamental Deer Fence

Planting “Deer Resistant” Plants

In areas of severe deer pressure, the deer will eat anything. No plant is resistant to the antler rubbing damage. Some of the list below are USUALLY left alone.

Deciduous Trees

Acer sp Maples
Betula nigra River Birch
Carpinus sp. Hornbeam
Fagus sp. Beech
Fraxinus latifolia Oregon Ash

Evergreen Trees

Abies sp. Fir
Cedrus sp True Cedar
Chamaecyparis nootkatensis Alaskan Cedar
Cryptomeria sp. Japanese Cedar
Juniperus sp. Juniper
Picea sp Spruce
Pinus sp. Pine
Pseudotsuga menziesii Douglas Fir
Tsuga sp. Hemlock
Umbellularia californica Oregon Myrtle

Deciduous Shrubs

Berberis sp. Barberry
Callicarpa sp Beautyberry
Calycanthus sp Sweetshrub
Diervilla rivularis Bush Honeysuckle
Forsythia sp Forsythia
Fothergilla gardenia Dwarf Fothergilla
Kolkwitzia amabilis Beautybush
Poncirus trifoliata Osage Orange
Potentilla fruticosa Potentilla
Ribes nigrum Black Currant
Ribes sanguinum Red Flowering Currant
Sambucus sp. Elderberry
Syringa sp. Lilac
Viburnum sp Deciduous Viburnums

Evergreen Shrubs

Arbutus unedo Strawberry Tree
Arctostaphylos sp. Manzanita
Aucuba japonica Aucuba
Berberis sp. Evergreen Barberry

Ceanothus sp. California Wild Lilac
Choisya sp. Mexican Orange
Cistus sp. Rock Rose
Citrus junos Yuzu
Daphne sp Evergreen Daphne
Elaeagnus pungens Silverberry
Garrya sp. Silktassel
Elaeagnus pungens Silverberry
Gaultheria shallon Salal
Laurelus noblis Bay Tree
Mahonia aquifolium Oregon Grape
Mahonia x Hybrid Mahonia
Myrica (Morella) californica Pacific Wax Myrtle
Osmanthus sp Osmanthus
Pachystima myrsinites Oregon Box
Pieris sp Pieris
Prostanthera cuneata Bush Mint
Rhododendron sp. Rhododendron (large leafed only)
Sarcococca sp Sweet Box
Viburnum sp Evergreen Viburnum

Perennials

Achillea sp. Yarrow
Agave parryii -Agave
Arabis sp. Rockcress
Armeria maritima Sea thrift
Bergenia sp. Bergenia
Crococsmia sp. Crocosmia or Montbretia
Coreopsis sp. Coreopsis or Tickseed
Dianthus sp Pinks
Dicentra sp. Bleeding Heart
Echinacea sp. Purple Coneflower
Echinops sp. Globe Thistle
Eriogonum sp. Buckwheat
Eryngium sp. Sea Holly
Euphorbia sp. Spurge
Fargesia sp Clumping Bamboo
Geranium sp Hardy Geranium
Hakonechloa macra Japanese Forest Grass
Helictotrichon sempervirons Blue Oat Grass

Helleborus sp. Hellebore
Hemerocallis sp. Daylily
Humulus lupulus Hops
Iris sp. Iris
Kniphofia sp. Red Hot Poker
Lavendula sp Lavender
Liatris sp. Gayfeather
Miscanthus sp Maiden Grass
Monarda sp. Bee Balm
Nepeta sp. Catmint
Origanum sp Oregano
Oxalis oregona Redwood Sorrel
Paeonia sp Peony
Papaver sp. Poppy
Pennisetum sp Feather Grass

Peroskia atriplicifolia Russian Sage
Penstemon sp. Beardtongue
Rudbeckia sp. Black-eyed Susan
Phygelius sp. Cape Fuchsia
Phyllostachys sp Bamboo
Salvia sp. Flowering & Edible Sage
Salvia rosmarinus (Rosmarinus officianalis)
Rosemary
Thymus sp Thyme

Ferns

Adiantum sp Maidenhair Fern
Anthyrium sp Painted Fern
Blechnum sp Water Fern, Deer Fern
Dryopteris sp Autumn Fern, Male Fern
Polystichum sp Sword Fern, Tassel Fern

Internet Resources:

[WSU Hortsense](#) and [Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife](#)