



Dissuading Deer from Your garden.

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The explosive growth of the white-tailed deer population in the mid-Atlantic during the past decade has created intense frustration for gardeners. Besides devouring plants and trampling terrain, the threat of infection from Lyme Disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever can't be ignored.

In order to dissuade deer from your garden, it is very important to understand that one way deer are able to communicate effectively is by scent. Their cloven hooves contain scent glands, as do their hocks and other locations on their body. A wayward fawn can trace its mother's scent trail if it strays. Deer mark out territories in much the same way as do cats and dogs: they leave a scent trail. If no deer scent is present, deer will largely avoid an area. No single approach works all of the time so an integrated approach may prove to be most effective. Deer are known to be intelligent enough to be trained to stay away from specific areas. The various approaches described below largely depend on convincing deer that your garden is an area that's unsafe and unpalatable for them so that they will stay away!

1. Grow deer resistant plants

A common misconception is that "deer will eat anything and everything." Rhonda Hart's book *Deerproofing Your Yard & Garden* lists half a page of deer favorites, twelve pages of plants that deer avoid eating, and a half page of deer-repellant plants. These lists include a wide variety of annuals, bulbs and rhizomes, groundcovers, ornamental grasses, bamboos, perennials, shrubs, and trees. Garden centers and mail-order nurseries are increasingly identifying and providing lists of deer resistant plants. The richest source of information is the Internet. Caveat emptor: growing these plants will not keep deer out of your garden because deer will still follow scent trails so terrain damage and dangers of infection from deer tick bites remain.

2. Milorganite Lawn Fertilizer

This is a true "two-fer" since it dissuades deer and fertilizes your lawn at the same time. Although it consists of reconstituted and pelletized Milwaukee sewage sludge it doesn't have an offensive odor to humans. It is available at most local garden centers and can be applied using a typical lawn fertilizer drop-spreader. For specific plants or beds create a "shaker" from a coffee can with holes drilled in the plastic lid. Reapplication is

needed only after six weeks but winter re-applications can wait for up to two months. The high hop residue odor masks any deer scent, severing and re-routing their trails.

3. PlotSaver System from Messina Wildlife

(www.messinawildlife.com): The patented "PlotSaver" system offered by Messina Wildlife is very effective in dissuading deer for about four weeks. "PlotSaver" consists of a reusable, loosely woven plastic barrier ribbon that is strung from inexpensive plant stakes placed around the perimeter of the garden or individual borders. The tape is sprayed with a pleasantly scented deterrent spray called "DeerStopper," which contains rosemary oil, or with "Liquid Fence," which has to be reapplied if it rains. Incorporating a few twists in the ribbon causes it to flutter in the breeze unsettling deer even more. Periodically check the ribbon since it may be knocked down by fallen tree limbs. Figure 1 below shows a two-tape barrier, which is highly recommended. It is also recommended to spray power poles, mailbox post, and all trees and shrubs, even those that deer do not browse, about 3 feet from the ground. If your lot is surrounded by a three-rail fence, spray the top rail. If your garden is planted with evergreens, spray them even if they are deer resistant.

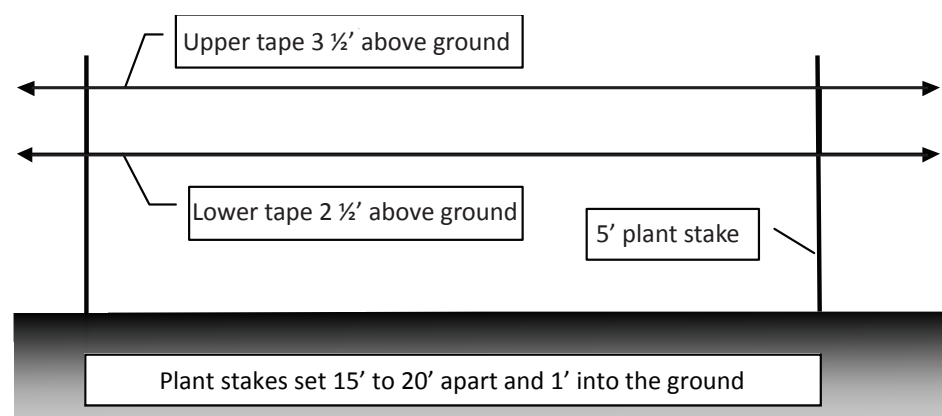
This distribution of scent keeps the deer at bay as they fear to tread in your “unsafe” garden. In addition to “ready to use” form, the sprays are also economically available as concentrates to be diluted for use in a two-gallon pressure sprayer.

4. Wireless Deer Fence

(www.wirelessdeerfence.com): Despite the name there is no physical fence involved in this approach. The system consists of individual electronic devices that stand about 18 inches tall. The base contains two AA batteries plus some electronics. The top of each device consists of a pair of crossed-insulated wires forming a “cage” in which a fruit-scented resin lure is inserted. Deer are attracted to the lure but, when they contact the wires of the “cage,” they receive a very low current 500-volt jolt. This system is best deployed in your front garden where you would prefer not to have tape fences strung around. They are also useful as a back-up elsewhere if your tape barrier is compromised. The batteries last at least a year but the scented lures must be replaced once a month.

With the use of a multi-pronged deer training approach combined with a shift to plants that deer generally will not eat you can have an enjoyable year round garden.

Figure 1: Design for a twin-tape deer fence using a tape barrier ribbon sprayed with DeerStopper



Notes

1. The design is based on the Plot Saver system recommended by Messina Wildlife (<http://www.messinawildlife.com>)
2. Plant stakes are 1/2 inch diameter, green with rough surface, available at most garden centers. Stakes with clips to hold the tape are also available at the above site.
3. Tape is DeerStopper “barrier tape” available at local garden centers or on-line.
4. Tapes must be taut between stakes.
5. Twist the tape about ten times between each pair of stakes to produce motion in a breeze.
6. Use a magic marker on the stakes to mark the soil line (1 foot from the pointed end) and the location of each of the tape attachment points.
7. Wrap tape twice around each stake. Heavy-duty florist wire wrapped twice around the tape at the stakes and twisted very tight with pliers will keep the tape in place.
8. To provide a “gate” through the fence, make a “hook” from the florist wire and a loop at one end of the tape.
9. At corners, use a second stake angled to prevent the corner stake from being pulled inward (join the stakes with twisted florist wire).
10. The tape should be as continuous as your plantings allow and end, if possible, at a house corner or wall.
11. Single tape systems can use shorter (4 feet) stakes, with 9 inches below soil level and the tape 3 feet high. This is useful for small beds.

Happy Gardening!

Feel free to contact me with any of your questions and suggestions.

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