

Deer Prevention for Flower Retention

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Anyone living in the rivertowns knows that deer are snacking in our gardens more and more frequently and with each season they seem less and less shy of human contact. Often they silently stand just a few feet away watching our horrified reactions at the latest scene of plant slaughter.

As food supply in the woods diminishes, the deer naturally move to the margins — the woodland's edge — which provides ideal, safe conditions for browsing. Unfortunately, in suburban areas like the rivertowns, the woodland's edge zone equals our yards and gardens.

Some basics of deer psychology are that the doe teaches its young fawn where to browse and what to browse on. Deer are naturally curious and attracted to new, never-before-encountered plant materials. Any newly planted beds will surely be tasted the same evening by local deer if not properly protected.

Here is a list of strategies to minimize the impact of deer in your garden. Always combine and use as many types of deterrent as possible. Food preferences may vary widely from herd to herd. Experiment to find out what works best for your locale.

Deer repellants: Deer repellants work but you have to be fastidious with your application schedule. For early spring, when plants are first emerging as shoots, a granular repellant sprinkled generously over your garden beds is most effective. Try Deer Scram or Milorgantie, a less expensive product that also serves as an organic fertilizer.

Once plants have leafed out more, apply foliar sprays. These repel deer via smell and/or bad taste. The label may suggest reapplication after six to eight weeks. It's best to reapply after every six inches of new growth or every four weeks maximum. With perennials such as daylilies be sure to spray the scapes and buds once a week throughout their growth cycle. Recommended brands include Deer Stopper, Deer Solution, Bobex and PlantSkydd, with the last two being effective in cold weather.

Deer Fortress is a granular repellant in a small green can and stake that can be placed around the garden on six- to eight-foot centers.

Deer-resistant plants: Some general characteristics of plants that deer avoid include plants with fuzzy or silver leaves (Lambs Ears — *Stachys byzantina*, Lavender, Pinks — *Dianthus*), aromatic herbs, plants with thorns (Barberry but unfortunately not roses), plants with a strong scent (Boxwood) and plants that are highly poisonous (*Andromeda* – *Pieris japonica*, Foxglove – *Digitalis*).

There are many sources of such lists, including Cornell Extension and Mohonk Mountain House. Note that what works often changes from season to season, year to year, herd to herd. Deer don't read lists. Ultimately, starving deer will eat anything. For more information, visit these links:

counties.cce.cornell.edu/tompkins/current/deerresistantplants.pdf
www.gardening.cornell.edu/factsheets/deerdef/mohonk_list.pdf

Physical deterrents: The most effective protection is to make your garden inaccessible. Total exclusion requires a fence seven to eight feet high with absolutely no gaps along the sides or bottom. A less expensive but unproven alternative is to string transparent fishing line tautly in three strands

at 12-, 24- and 36-inch heights above the ground, and tie flags to the top string every six feet or so. This spooks the near-sighted deer by forming a virtual fence that they feel but can't clearly see.

For smaller areas, burlap wrapping works well during winter. Be sure to stake the wrapping six inches away from outer leaves to allow air flow and reduce winter burn.

Electronic systems: The DeerTech (also known as Nature Technology) system of click noise generators interferes with the deer's acutely sensitive hearing, making them nervous about possible predators. Deer won't stay in the sound field for long and move on. This high tech system is combined with a spray program for maximum effectiveness.

Non-effective deer deterrents include water sprayers or sound alarms triggered by motion, twirly/flashy visual stuff, Ivory or Irish Spring soap bars, human hair and predator urine.

Learn how to differentiate between deer damage versus groundhog or rabbit damage. Deer damage typically shows up as flowers, leaves, branches, twigs and stems chewed off roughly. Always look for deer tracks in the mulch or dirt to confirm. Groundhog damage can often be seen as bent and broken stalks or stems that have only the leaves and flowers chewed off. Rabbit damage usually involves everything being eaten to the ground. Observe the differences. You may need to combine multiple deterrent strategies in the fight against your garden's culprits.

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