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?

Figure 1. Antler Damaged Tree

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?

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.

Figure 3. 10' Deer Fence

Figure 2. 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, polypropelene 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.

Figure 4. Young Orchard with Mini-fencing

Repellents

Deer repellents work by coating the plants with a disagreeable odor or taste. 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. This also needs to be moved frequently to keep the deer from becoming too accustomed to it.

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.

Planting "Deer Resistant" Plants

There are many lists of "Deer Resistant" plants out there; unfortunately, deer don't read. In areas of severe deer pressure, the deer will eat anything. In areas of light to moderate

deer pressure, they may taste these plants, but usually will not eat them to the ground. No plant is resistant to the antler rubbing damage.

Deciduous Trees
- *Betula sp.* Birch.
- *Carpinus sp.* Hornbeam
- *Fagus sp.* Beech
- *Fraxinus latifolia* Oregon Ash
- *Ficus caria* Edible Fig

Evergreen Trees
- *Abies sp.* Fir
- *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
- *Poncirus trifoliate* Osage Orange
- *Potentilla sp.* Potentilla
- *Ribes nigrum* Black Currant
- *Sambucus sp.* Elderberry
- *Syringa sp.* Lilac

Evergreen Shrubs
- *Arctostaphylos sp.* Manzanita
- *Berberis sp.* Evergreen Barberry
- *Ceanothus sp.* California Wild Lilac
- *Choisya sp.* Mexican Orange
- *Cistus sp.* Rock Rose
- *Elaegnus pungens* Silverberry
- *Garrya elliptica* Silktassel
- *Gaulteria shallon* Salal
- *Juniperus sp.* Juniper
- *Lavendula sp.* Lavender
- *Mahonia aquifolium* Oregon Grape
- *Myrica californica* Pacific Wax Myrtle
- *Pachystima myrsinites* Oregon Box
- *Rhododendorn sp.* Rhododendron (large leafed only)
- *Rosimarinus officianalis* Rosemary

Perennials
- *Achillea sp.* Yarrow
- *Arabis sp.* Rockcress
- *Armeria maritimea* Sea thrift
- *Coreopsis sp.* Coreopsis
- *Dicentra sp.* Bleeding Heart
- *Echinacea sp.* Purple Coneflower
- *Echinops sp.* Globe Thistle
- *Eriogonum sp.* Buckwheat
- *Eryngium sp.* Sea Holly
- *Euphorbia sp.* Spurge
- *Gaillardia sp.* Blanket Flower
- *Helleborus sp.* Hellebore
- *Hemerocallis sp.* Daylily
- *Iris sp.* Iris
- *Kniphofia sp.* Red Hot Poker
- *Liatris sp.* Gayfeather
- *Lupinus sp.* Lupine
- *Monarda sp.* Bee Balm
- *Nepeta sp.* Catmint
- *Papaver sp.* Poppy
- *Penstemon sp.* Beardtongue
- *Peroskia atriplicifolia* Russian Sage
- *Phygelius sp.* Cape Fuchsia
- *Rudbeckia sp.* Black-eyed Susan
- *Zauschneria sp.* California Fuchsia

Internet Resources
- WSU Hortsense. http://pep.wsu.edu/hortsense/
- Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/deer.htm
- Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides http://www.pesticide.org/pubs/alts/deer/deer.html