

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET



Have Gardening Questions? The **Master Gardener Help Line** Hours are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).
Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: mghelpline@masshort.org.

Baffling Bambi

I like chocolate, you like strawberry, but almost no one likes garlic ice cream. That's the basic strategy to successfully keeping deer away from your garden. If you live with deer — and if you live in New England, you live with deer — you need to ensure your garden is not the tastiest buffet around. You can accomplish this in several ways: by carefully choosing plants that are not among deer favorites, by employing barrier plants, and by using chemical and physical barriers. But remember when the deer are hungry enough, no strategy will make your garden 100% deer proof!

Few of us want to go to the expense and trouble of an eight foot fence. At one time, thin black plastic meshes kept deer at bay. Now, they have learned to tear holes in such fences or even break them down. Fences must be of heavier materials and sturdier supports. For 100% success, you need to keep your driveway gated at all times.

Deer rely on their sense of smell to determine what is safe to eat. There are commercial or homemade liquid repellents, coyote urine, dried blood and strong soaps which have varying levels of effectiveness, but to be truly effective, scent repellents need to be applied regularly and consistently. Some (such as dried blood), will need to be reapplied after each rain or snow, for others (commercial repellents) every three or four weeks. You will need to periodically change your deterrent to keep the deer from becoming accustomed to it. Luckily, few of these smelly repellents are no-

ticeable to us after they have dried in place.

The next step is barrier plantings of poisonous or strong smelling plants, something that deer strongly dislike (such as mint) in front of or around something they are fond of (your tomatoes). In summer when food is abundant, deer will seldom bother to cross the barriers you have created. Deer usually avoid foliage which is fuzzy, leathery, sharp-edged, spiny, or prickly. And for reasons known only to deer, they tend to stay away from silver, black and bronze-colored plants.

Trees may suffer two types of damage from deer: the foliage will be eaten to the browse line (approx. 5' from the ground), and bucks often rub against or polish their antlers on resilient saplings, tree trunks under 3" in diameter, and multi-trunk ornamentals. Until trees mature, it may be prudent to protect them with a scent barrier or a wire mesh cage.

Too bad for us that the deer don't read the lists of "deer resistant" plants. Depending on the deer population density in a given area, drought or heavy snow cover reducing the food supply, deer will eat just about anything. On the reverse side of this sheet is a list of plants that experience tells us will give you a fighting chance in the battle against the deer.

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>