

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET

Have gardening questions? Contact the **Master Gardener Help Line.**

At Mass Hort, Wellesley: mghelpline@masshort.org, 617-933-4929

At Tower Hill Botanic Garden, Boylston: hortline@towerhillbg.org, 608-869-6111 x104

Please visit our website for Help Line hours: <http://massmastergardeners.org/what-i-do/>



DETECTING DEER

Gardeners have an oddly curious relationship with deer: their grace, gentleness and beauty represent the best of nature...until they dine. Then we only see green-eating, bottomless pits that destroy all vegetation within five feet of the ground. However, there are ways to ensure your garden is not the tastiest buffet around by carefully choosing plants that are not among deer favorites, by employing barrier plants, by using chemical and physical barriers, by using noise and light barriers, and by using electronic deer repellents. Of course, there are several homemade, organic approaches as well. But remember -- when the deer are hungry enough, no strategy will make your garden 100% deer proof except for one option: an eight-foot fence.

Few of us want to go to the expense of a fence, but if you do, there are some guidelines. It must be at least eight feet tall. Deer can jump over a four-foot fence effortlessly and a six-foot fence endangers the deer getting tangled in the fence. If you choose a lower fence, slant it outward at a 45 degree angle. The depth of a four-foot fence angled at 45 degrees will keep the deer from jumping over it.

Deer rely on their sense of smell to determine what is safe to eat. Commercial or homemade liquid repellents, coyote urine, dried blood, soap flakes, hot pepper spray, to name a few common repellents, have varying levels of success. To be truly effective, scent repellents need to be applied regularly and consistently at intervals from two to three weeks. You will need to periodically change your deterrent to keep the deer from becoming accustomed to it.

Human hair (collected from local hair salons) spread on the flower bed or placed in nylon stockings and hung around the corners of a vegetable garden has proven somewhat effective. The smell of human hair is said to send deer scurrying elsewhere.

The next step is barrier planting of noxious or strong-smelling plants. Planting mint, for example, in front of or around something deer are fond of will prevent them from crossing the barrier. Deer usually avoid foliage which is fuzzy, leathery, sharp-edged, spiny or prickly. Roses are the exception to this rule. And, for reasons known only to the deer, they tend to stay away from plants with leaves of silver, black, or and bronze.

Trees may suffer two types of damage from deer: the foliage will be eaten to the browse line (approx. 5 feet from the ground) and bucks will rub against and polish their antlers on small tree trunks or multi-trunk ornamentals. Wrap the trunks of immature trees with four-foot high galvanized hardware cloth or chicken wire, or use either material to encircle plants prone to attack.

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

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.

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