

Learn to Coexist with Deer

Before 1800, Ohio was 95% forest and 5% marsh and prairie. Consequently, deer were very prevalent in Ohio. By 1904 they were virtually wiped out by their natural predators and from over hunting. Since deer were re-introduced in the early 1900s, the Whitetail deer have flourished, living just about anywhere and eating just about anything to survive. They did not retreat as our country became more populated; instead, they learned to adapt. Their diet can consist of many of the plants we enjoy in our yards.

Unfortunately, their favorite snack foods are also some of our favorite shrubs, flowering plants and perennials. High risk plants are: hosta, rhododendron, evergreen azaleas, burning bush, arborvitae, yews, mountain laurel, Japanese holly, Tea rose and tulips. Citizens can learn to modify their landscapes in an effort to control damage. The City will produce a series of educational print pieces and videos to assist citizens in their efforts.

Substitute high risks with dislikes

Rather than filling your yard with plants that you KNOW will attract deer, plant things that deer do NOT like. Deer do not like plants with coarse, fuzzy, bristly or spiny textures and they shun plants with intense aromas. These include: astilbe, coral bells, juniper, hawthorne and any prickly or thorny plant. Deer will naturally avoid lily of the valley, hellebores and foxglove, as they are toxic.

Plants with strong aromas include: lemon, mint, sage, alyssum, dame's rocket, money plant, nasturtiums and rock cress. You can also plant heavily scented herbs like Artemisia, lavender, Russian sage, tansy, yarrow, thyme, tarragon, oregano, dill and chives.

Consider mixing confusing smells, like chives with daylilies, or daffodils with tulips. If you can provide plants that they don't like -- they will move on to find food elsewhere.

More tricks

Deer have poor depth perception. If they can't get a look into your yard they will be leery of coming in. Use hedges and dense fencing to surround your yard to keep deer out.

Deer are afraid of things they don't understand. Some people have had success using two strands of nylon fishing line strung around their tomato plants or shrubs. The deer can't see the nylon line but they feel something rubbing against their bodies; they become confused and will move on.

Plastic fencing or chicken wire can also be used around tree bases or shrubs to discourage feeding.

Repellent Products

A product called Liquid Fence has been reported as being effective and it is available at local garden centers. It has a strong odor until it dries.

Another product, called Plantskydd Deer Repellent is an all natural product that provides up to 6 months of protection. It also works by emitting an odor that animals associate with predator activity. Users have reported good success. It can be ordered on line at www.plantskydd.com.

Whitetail deer are creatures of habit and follow established paths for food and water. They are not afraid of humans. If we use a combination of beautiful plants that are least vulnerable and use protective fences and hedges, we can share our space with wildlife, and save our plants and trees.

This information has been compiled by the City of Mentor with assistance from the Ohio State University Extension (Lake County). For a list of plants that will survive in deer country, call a Master Gardener at (440) 350-2582 or (440) 918-2582, ext. 2582 and ask for Fact Sheet 828.