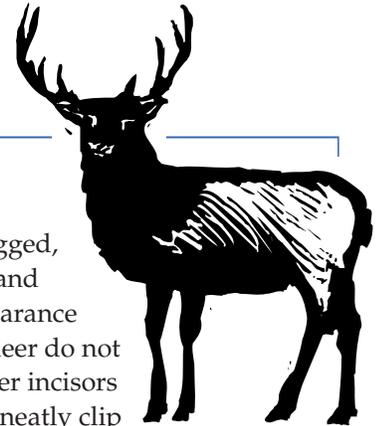


LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

Humane, Effective Solutions to Human-Wildlife Conflicts

A Program of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals



Take Preventative Steps to Keep Deer Away

In cities, suburbs, and small towns across Massachusetts, people are noticing a change in their neighborhoods. Some think it's good. Some think it's bad. But everybody seems to be talking about it: more wild animals are making their homes in and around people's yards and houses, in parks and playgrounds, in business developments, even right on Main Street.

As herbivores, deer feed on a variety of plant material throughout the seasons, sometimes damaging landscapes and helping themselves to the fruits of gardeners' labor. Here are some things that you can do to encourage deer to keep off your property and minimize—and even eliminate—damage to your property.

General Information

One of the ungulates, or hooved mammals, deer are among the best-known of animals. The white-tailed deer, one of the most common species, can be found throughout the United States except for parts of the Far West.

Adult male deer, called bucks, can weigh more than 400 pounds and usually live in small groups. Does, adult female deer, can weigh up to 40 percent less than bucks and live in larger groups including offspring.

Mating season, known as the rut, occurs between October and January, with one to three fawns usually born in May or June. Deer can jump over fences eight feet high and can run up to 40 miles per hour.

They are often found living at forest edges where they can retreat into the forest for shelter and escape and can browse in open areas or fields.

Agricultural lands with woodlots, fields, and streams are common areas for deer. Deer have home ranges that are used by related females and exclude sexually mature related males. White-tailed deer are most often active at dusk and dawn, when there is less danger. Herbivores, they feed on a variety of plant material throughout

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the seasons, including flowers, shrubs, acorns, cultivated plants, and ornamental shrubbery. They will even eat grass if need be. The feeding habits of deer can vary widely depending on location.

Possible Conflicts and Solutions

It is usually not difficult to determine deer damage, especially in gardens and landscaped areas. Tracks and droppings are good signs of their presence. Another easy way to tell if the animal is a deer is to look at twig ends. Plants or trees that are browsed by deer

have a ragged, squared, and torn appearance because deer do not have upper incisors and can't neatly clip plants. Areas with high deer density may show a "browse line," where vegetation has been trimmed from the ground up to the deer height (usually around three to six feet). Sometimes damage to tree bark can occur when bucks rub their antlers along tree trunks.

There are a variety of techniques that can be used to minimize and even eliminate damage done by deer. Landscape design, including careful selection and placement of plants, is helpful. Planting native species of shrubs and trees can help, as well as beginning preventative measures against deer damage before it begins, especially in the spring. Consulting with local nursery or landscaping companies about appropriate plants is a good first step, as they often have listings of deer-resistant and deer-attracting plants and know what kinds of plants are being eaten in various areas and at different times.

If deer browsing is heavy, deer-proof fencing is the most effective and long-term way to protect resources such as crops or landscape plants.

A range of fencing designs is available, from high-tensile strand wiring, which may be angled for

better effectiveness, to standard mesh-woven wire, chain-link designs, and various types of electric wiring. Fences should be at least eight feet high and extend underground to prevent fawns from crawling underneath them. Very simple fencing designs can be used if there are other food sources available in the area, but if food is in high demand, deer can jump fences even ten feet high. Fencing individual plants is often effective if fencing an entire area is too expensive (netting can sometimes be used, too). Trees can be protected from buck rubs by wrapping them with corrugated plastic sleeves or surrounding the trees with two-inch wooden stakes four to five feet high.

Repellents can be used to discourage deer; they work by either directly making the plants distasteful or by deterring deer from an area through sight, smell, or sound. Repellents work well in smaller areas and gardens. Homemade repellents can be made by placing human hair, soap, or garlic in netting or stocking and tying it to tree branches or fences around an area that needs protection. Commercially made contact repellents are also

THE LIVING WITH WILDLIFE MISSION

The MSPCA Living With Wildlife program aims to protect wild species, now and in the future. The program promotes peaceful coexistence between people and wildlife in urban, suburban, and rural Massachusetts communities by helping to resolve human-animal conflicts in a humane, nonlethal, long-term, and cost-effective manner.

available that can be sprayed directly onto plants (many cannot be used on food crops, however).

With any kind of repellent, the key is to begin using it as soon as you see deer damage, and change or reapply them often, especially after rain or when new growth appears.

Another kind of harassment technique that may repel deer is the use of scarecrows and effigies (especially ones that move). Motion-sensing lights, scare tape, balloons, mirrors, strips of tinfoil, and even wind chimes and radios can be effective in frightening deer away from an area. Varying these devices and using them in combination with other strategies can ensure that they remain successful.

Public-Health Concerns

Deer can be hosts to the ticks that carry Lyme disease, although there is debate about their role in contributing to the spread and prevalence of this disease. The adult tick can live on deer or other hosts at this stage of its life cycle. Declining deer densities do not affect the production of new ticks.

For more information about humanely solving human-wildlife conflicts or about the MSPCA's Living With Wildlife program, call (617) 522-7400, visit www.livingwithwildlife.org, or e-mail lww@mspca.org.