



Nursery News

November 2007 - Research & Development
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Urban Wildlife



For many, animals and birds of the urban environment are such part of everyday life that they are barely noticed. Others actively attract wildlife with feeders, houses or water features, remaining engaged in and sensitive to the natural world.

With the expansion of building in urban and suburban areas, there is loss of habitat for wildlife. Some species have adapted by including the landscaped yard as part of their habitat, and feeding on the bountiful plants provided by their human neighbors. For instance, Whitetail Deer naturally prefer to live in open forests or on the forest edge, where light penetrates. The increased fragmentation of our forested areas may have contributed to the increase in deer population. If mortality is low and food is plentiful, deer populations can double in 2-3 years. The Eastern Cottontail rabbit also finds your backyard a perfect source of food and shelter and will quickly populate the area in exponential numbers.

Who is eating my plants?

- Rabbits, mice and other rodents leave clean cuts, at 45-degree angles or gnaw on the bark a few inches above or below ground in irregular patches with their powerful upper front incisors.
- Deer grab and pull at plants leaving ragged broken branches or even pulling small plants out completely. Height of deer damage can be up to 6-8 feet.
- Young trees can also be damaged by deer scraping the bark with their antlers.
- Damage will be worse in cold winters with a lot of snow cover.



Options to Protect Plants:

- Select Plants that the wildlife don't prefer such as Hawthorn, Honeylocust, Dogwood and Forsythia
 (for more see 'Oh Deer-Can Plants Protect Landscaping' at www.beesongrows.com/ArchivePage.html)
 - Generally, deer and rabbits will avoid plants with a lot of sap or plants that are aromatic
 - No plant is completely safe, even a plant that is not preferred can be attractive in the right circumstances.
- Scare devices
 - Lights, whistles, loud noises, or scarecrows can deter unwanted wild visitors
 - Use caution in residential areas
- Repellents
 - Taste or Odor repellents can be used in small areas
 - Many Natural Non-toxic options
 - Must be reapplied, and none are 100% effective
- Fencing
 - Snow fences or cotton rope fence used with a repellent can be effective for small areas
 - Temporary plastic netting and wire cages can protect individual plants or small groups
 - Temporary electric fences are recommended only in extreme cases- not a good idea in suburban areas
 - Permanent woven-wire fences or cages can protect high-value plants
- Trained deer chasing attack dogs
 (sounds funny, but they exist for large areas of high value crops)
- The Verminator (Anyone see 'Over the Hedge'?)

How High Can They Go?

Deer

8ft high fences usually work for large areas, 6ft high fences can be used in areas less than 15 ft wide because deer have poor depth perception and will avoid jumping into narrow areas. You can also use 2 shorter fences a few feet apart.

Rabbits

2ft high fencing buried a few inches to prevent digging, and small openings the rabbits can't squeeze through





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Everyone has to eat though, and sometimes it can be near impossible to prevent wildlife browsing. In these cases it may be easier on your sanity to accept some damage to your landscape, and work on tolerating your wild neighbors.

Wildlife need food, water, shelter, and space in order to survive, so manipulating these habitat factors can affect wildlife populations, whether you are encouraging or discouraging urban wildlife from your yard.



Food:

Plants that produce fruits/berries, seeds, nectar, nuts/acorns, or foliage for browsing can provide food for wildlife. Insects are also a popular food source, and you may want to welcome the beneficial wildlife that control the pest population of your yard, including Bats (eat up to 3,000 mosquitoes per night) and many bird species.

Water:

Fountains, puddles, ponds, drainage ditches, fruit, and droplets on plants are all water sources that may be provided by your landscape. Large water features may attract species of waterfowl, though some may be undesirable and messy.

Shelter:

Dense trees or plantings can attract songbirds, but may also attract large flocks of noisy messy birds, such as blackbirds or starlings.



Space:

Competition for food, water, and shelter will limit the number of wildlife that can survive in an area. Different wildlife species have different space requirements.



Deer may frequent Suburban areas with open lawns, lush summer gardens, lots of ornamental shrubs, and patches of cover. Deer Generally consume 3% of body weight per day:

- Spring-Summer- feed on grasses, leaves, twigs, buds (especially like oak and sugar maple seedlings)
- Fall- feed on mast (acorns and other nuts)
- Winter- Early Spring- feed twigs and buds (most severe damage to landscape plants occurs in late winter-early spring)

for a list of plants that are somewhat resistant see:
'Oh Deer-Can Plants Protect Landscaping'
at www.beesongrows.com/ArchivePage.html



Resources:

'White-Tailed Deer' by Paul D. Curtis and Kristi L. Sullivan
Cornell Cooperative Extension, Wildlife Damage Management
Program Wildlife Damage Management Fact Sheet Series

'When deer and rabbits attack - Gardeners need to do their homework to protect their tasty plants' By U. of I. Extension
Illinois Times website: illinois.gyrosite.com June 14, 2007:

'Urban Wildlife: Challenges and Opportunities'
<http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/lcr/LGIEN2002-0014.html>