

Curbing Unwanted Critters

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One of the most asked questions I receive this time of year is what do I do to keep deer or rabbits from eating or destroying all my plants? Deer and rabbits can wipe out gardens, flowerbeds, and destroy trees and shrubs literally overnight. Thankfully, we generally only have to worry about deer damage in the early spring and late fall but if we have a hard winter or the native vegetation dries up the deer and rabbits will move even more into yards. I see deer and rabbits in different parts of town all year long.

Most everyone enjoys seeing deer and rabbits particularly if they are in their yard or close to their house. However, if they cause damage then they are thought of as a pest. This can cause quite a problem if one neighbor is feeding them and the other neighbor wants them out of their yard.

Some of the temporary measures to consider discouraging deer and sometimes rabbits from damaging plants include; hanging bars of scented soap, hanging sweaty clothing, hanging bags of human hair, sprinkling dried blood around the plants, mothballs, or spraying commercial or homemade repellents on the plants. One of the new products has hot pepper juice as an ingredient. The problem with these treatments is they are temporary. Rain or snow washes most of these applications off or the effectiveness wears off after a week or 10 days. This reapplication can be time consuming and costly. There are also motion detection devices hooked up to lights or sprinklers which may be effective.

Then there is the method of a permanent type of solution, called fencing. There are as many ways to fence critters out as there are types of fence. You could put a 10-foot fence around your property, but this can cost quite a sum of money. You can individually put some kind of fence around each individual tree or at least the high dollar ones. However, probably the best type of fence without being too costly and being less distracting would be either using an electric fence or just using the smooth wire to go around the plants. Electric fences are usually baited with peanut butter and supply a mild shock that deters deer without harming them. This fence should have at least three strands one foot to two foot apart and at say around a 45-degree angle away from the tree, if using this for smaller critters the bottom wire needs to be four inches from the ground. This type of fence around a tree keeps the deer from rubbing or eating the tree and on larger areas, having the wires at an angle confuses the deer as to depth and generally, a 5-foot high fence will keep deer from jumping it. Another method is to use fishing line around the trees, which is less obtrusive (not effective for rabbits).

The other consideration is planting species the critters do not prefer to eat. A partial list of plants would include: Periwinkle, Lily-of-the Valley, Yarrow, columbine, Dianthus, Purple coneflower, sunflower, Iris, Lavender, daffodil, Goldenrod, Yucca, Clematis, Honeysuckle vine, Barberry, Japanese plum yew, Caragana, Dogwood, Russian Olive, Juniper, Honeysuckle, Mockorange, some roses, Sumac, Buckthorn, Plum, Lilac, Maple, Birch, Hawthorn Locust, Spruce, Austrian Pine, Mugo Pine, Scotch Pine. These are some of the plants, which deer seem to leave alone better than others. By planting cat mint around valued plants can help also. However, like everything else, there are always exceptions and each situation and location can be different. Most Universities have developed information sheets to address this issue including The University of Wyoming; these are available at the County Extension Offices or on the Web. I have found that the first year of planting critters will eat just about anything, however after that first year these plants do well.

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