

5 ways to protect your garden from the deer

By Melinda Myers

Don't let your vegetable and fall flower gardens succumb to hungry deer. Even if you're lucky enough to be deer-free now, be vigilant and prepared to prevent damage as these beautiful creatures move into your landscape to dine. Here are five tactics to help you in the battle against these hungry animals.

Fencing is the best, though not always practical, way to control deer. Install a 4- to 5-foot-high fence around small garden areas. This is usually enough to keep out deer that seem to avoid small confined spaces. The larger the area, the more likely deer will enter. Some gardeners report success surrounding their garden or landscape with strands of fishing line set at 12 inches and 36 inches above the ground.

Low voltage electric fencing or posts baited with a deer repellent are also options. Just be sure to check with your local municipality before installing this type of fencing.

Scare tactics are less effective on deer in urban environments. They are used to human scents and sounds. Many gardeners report success with motion sensor sprinklers. As the deer passes in front of the motion sensor it starts the sprinkler and sends them running. Just be sure to turn off the sprinkler when you go out to garden.

Repellents that make plants taste or smell bad to deer can also help. You will find products containing things like garlic, hot pepper oil, and predator urine. Apply them before the animals start feeding for the best results. And reapply as directed on the label. Look for products that are easy to apply, odorless and last a long time.

Include deer resistant plants whenever possible. Even though no plant is 100 percent deer-proof, there are those the deer are less likely to eat. Include plants rated as rarely or seldom damaged by deer. And be sure to provide additional protection if you include plants known to be frequently or severely damaged.

Constantly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the methods used. Deer often change their feeding location and preferred food. And if the populations are high and the deer are hungry, they will eat just about anything. Be willing to change things up if one method is not working. Using multiple tactics will help increase your level of success.

So don't let hungry deer stop you from gardening. Be vigilant and persistent and send them elsewhere to dine.

Gardening expert Melinda Myers has more than 30 years of horticulture experience and has written more than 20 gardening books, including "Small Space Gardening" and the "Midwest Gardener's Handbook".