



## DEER, OH DEAR!

### Host Plants

Deer eat a wide range of plant material, but are particularly fond of the leaves, stems and buds of woody plants, and in the winter they will consume the bark. Roses are a favorite, as are fruit trees, grains, and vegetables, especially corn. Garden targets are not limited to these plants, however. Favorites vary with the season and with the availability of other food, although they generally do not like grasses.

### Plant Damage and Symptoms

Deer are most active near dawn or dusk. They are browsing animals, often taking a bite or two off of a plant, and then moving on. As they browse, they tear at the plants, leaving them with a distinctive jagged appearance. Damage is usually too high off the ground to have been caused by rabbits or other rodents. Deer pellets or tracks are likely to be found in the area as well.

### Controls

Exclusion is the best control method. Unfortunately, most deer fencing is expensive, unattractive and impractical for use in a suburban yard. A solid fence 6 or more feet tall is an effective deterrent because deer cannot see what is on the other side. Black plastic or sheets hung from a line around the vegetable garden may be effective for the same reason. Four-foot wide wire mesh or plastic laid on the ground around the garden sometimes works because the deer feel uncertain about walking over it, and they don't like to jump over wide obstacles. Snow fencing can be effective in small areas (less than 40' by 60').

Protect trees with wire netting or plastic stripping around trunks. Try loosely wrapping a wire along the length of the most susceptible branches. Place wire cages around individual plants that need protection.

Scare devices sometimes work, but these must be started before deer have established the habit of feeding in the area. Possible scare tactics to try include leaving on a radio or flashing lights in the area, or hanging pie pans or tin cans where they will rattle. Dogs tied near the garden can scare away deer, though sometimes only temporarily, because the deer may eventually realize that the dog can't catch them.

Many repellants are sold for deer. These are sometimes effective in reducing the amount of damage, but most must be reapplied frequently, particularly after rains. Homemade repellants such as those made from hot pepper sauce or rotten eggs are less expensive but have the same limitations.

Deodorant soap, particularly Dial, suspended from the ends of branches is said to be quite effective. Do not use soap with cocoa butter in it, as deer are attracted to this. Other homemade repellants include pet hair, human hair or mothballs hung in mesh bags around vulnerable plants, and baby powder sprinkled in the target area.