

DEER MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR SPRINGTIME GROWERS

by Jennifer Smith

The snow always brings challenges for gardeners at the start of each new year; but now that the snow is melted and warm weather is here to stay, it's time to plant vibrant flowers to bring gardens back to life. Before growers begin digging into fresh soil, they will need to develop a deer management plan that will not only get them through this growing season, but for every season to follow.

Gardeners may forget that natural resources were scarce in the winter season; and white-tailed deer and small critters have been waiting for months to

eat something (anything) freshly planted. Therefore, deer control in the garden is important at the start of March. Be ready to stop wild animals with the following wildlife control strategies.

1. THE BEST DEFENSE IS A DEER FENCE

About Deer Fence

Installing a deer fence around plants is the most reliable means for deer management in gardens. Not only does deer fencing reduce the number of crops that are damaged, but a garden fence

reduces the number of deer that travel to a growing area. Deer are creatures of habit; and the deer herd will continuously return to a garden if they know that they can flee the site undetected by gardeners.

Once deer smell flowerbeds, they will begin to move. First, they will walk the perimeter of the landscape, seeking easy entry into a garden area. Next, they will try to dig underneath the fence in hope that they can sneak in at the bottom. Lastly, they will attempt a jump.

The ideal heights of a deer fence are 7.5' and 8' feet high. While a deer can jump well over 7' feet, they won't attempt hurdles right away because of their poor vision. While we as humans can see 20/20 vision, deer vision is only at 20/40 making frontal images blurry and dim. If a deer makes it over a fence structure it is likely because the deer had a running start and the fence height was less than 7.5' feet high.

Fence Materials Matter

Although there are several types of fencing available on the market, not all are great fit to be used in controlling deer. Gardeners have used these different fences with varying degrees of success. Most standard fence types such as wooden privacy fencing and chain link fences are not effective deterrents for hungry deer. If you already have these types of fencing installed, consider using a conversion kit to raise the height of your existing fence to keep out deer.

Chain link fences are made from aluminum, not galvanized steel; so, they are bound to rust



Steel hex fencing being used to keep deer out of garden boxes.

after years in the heat. Chain link fences are a pain to install for fence installers. They aren't made from the lightweight fence material that other fence companies offer to gardeners. You can spot a chain link fence from a few blocks away. They don't "hide" well.

As a rule, it is recommended that gardeners not use a chain-link fence.

For gardeners looking for an effective deer fence, it is best to choose a polypropylene fence or a PVC-coated metal deer fence. The decision to buy either type of deer fence depends on the amount of deer pressure on properties and if there are other animals that are causing agricultural damage.

A polypropylene fence is ideal for gardening areas with low to moderate levels of deer damage. This type of plastic deer fence is the most popular choice for gardeners looking for a lightweight, but durable fence to assemble in the

garden. These fences are specially designed to use the instincts of the deer against itself. The fence has a square mesh pattern designed to confuse a deer standing close to the fence. Additionally, the flexible nature of the fence will allow it flex and move causing naturally skittish deer to flee the area. If you are looking to keep out deer and chewing animals, you may want to consider adding a rodent barrier to the base of your deer fence. Small rodents, such as rabbits, groundhogs and gophers use their teeth in scissor motion to gnaw through materials to create small holes. Therefore, polypropylene fences ideal for rodent control in the garden.

However, the flexibility of this plastic square fence mesh makes this type of landscape fence easy to store, install and repair. Breaking strength for poly deer fences range from 650 lb/sq.ft. to 1,400 lb/sq.ft and are designed to last 15-20

years in the field.

A metal deer fence is the stronger fence option for gardeners that have had enough with chewing and digging animals including deer, rabbits, groundhogs and squirrels. Although there are many types of metal fence, choosing one that is PVC-coated will stand up to gnawing animals and the weather elements. Metal Deer Fence are virtually invisible and are successful deer and rodent barriers. Metal fences can last between 20-40 years based on the strength grade of fence.

Another very important reason to build a deer fence is for tick prevention. We can point the finger at the White-Footed Mouse for the spread of the Lyme Disease bacterium. It starts with mice transferring the disease to birds and other small rodents. Then, these animals carry the infection

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and pass them to ticks that find deer.

Ticks remained dormant in the wintertime as the temperatures dropped below freezing; but now ticks are fully active in grassy and woody areas awaiting their next blood meal from a warm-blooded mammal such as a human, pet, or deer. This puts outdoor enthusiasts, including gardeners, at risk of tick diseases.

The most common ticks, the Black-Legged Tick, the Lone Star Tick and the American Dog Tick, have been spotted throughout North America carrying tick-borne illnesses including Lyme Disease, Powassan Virus, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Southern Tick-Associated Rash Illness (STARI) and Ehrlichiosis. In 2017, a red meat allergy from a Lone Star Tick heightened concern of the dangers of ticks. But, according to the National Center for Biological Information, a division of the National Institute of Health, the use of deer fencing has been proven to reduce the risk of Lyme disease by 83-97 percent.

2. APPLY DEER REPELLENTS AROUND LANDSCAPE

Growers can apply liquid or granular deer repellents to further safeguard flowerbeds and to provide nourishment to dry plants. Deer Repellents are made from all-natural ingredients that are packed with flowery and herbal ingredients including garlic, pepper, mint and lavender that deer dislike in both taste and smell. Although deer repellents are useful deer management tools, they do require light management especially during the rainy months of the year. Growers should avoid spraying gardens when it is windy and when it is below 40°F.



Poly fencing being used as a physical barrier preventing unwanted access to a flower garden.

3. WAKE UP AND SMELL THE ROSES...WE DARE YOU.

Thorn bushes, such as roses and coneflower are types of plants that deer dislike eating and smelling. Thorn bushes can act as a deer barrier around flowerbeds and vegetable gardens. After the deer is pricked by the thorns, they will scout other gardens for food. Growers can also plant ornamental grasses that deer do not like such as iris, foxgloves and yucca in addition to herbs with strong fragrances including chives, sage, lemon, basil and garlic. Using high-scented perennial plants can mask the aroma of the nearby annuals that deer crave.

For growers that plan to use deer-resistant flowers as a deer management tactic, be careful what is planted in the garden. Some sweet-smelling plants attract

deer herds and will make them come back for more. Gardeners should avoid growing these types of plants *outside* of a deer fence: tulips, beans, peas, raspberries and azaleas. Trees bearing fruit will need tree guards to shield apples and peaches, as well.

Conclusion

Gardeners have tried unleashing domestic dogs on deer; they have used deer deterrents that involve loud noises and light; and they have even set out statues as scare tactics; but these attempts do not work as well as the combined use of deer fencing, repellents and deer-resistant flowers. Having a deer fence installed around gardens can make the difference between a successful growing season for the gardener or the deer. ■