

Bob Villa's Deer Deterrents

with edits from Eugene Berk, TFMD

Foraging deer can cause major damage to home gardens. These adorable woodland critters can ravage your yard by munching on foliage and trampling lawns. To a hungry deer, your colorful garden looks like a tasty snack.

1. Deer repellents can help prevent unwanted snacking and deer proof your garden (Edit - actually that is an overstatement as there is no one item that can guarantee such results.) The best deer repellent keeps peckish deer from grazing on your greenery, and they are usually safe and easy to use. Using an effective deer repellent means that you (not the deer) can enjoy the fruits of your labor.

Examples of commercially available deer deterrents are:

Chemical sprays;

1. Deer Out 32oz Concentrate Deer Repellent
2. Enviro Pro 1025 Deer Scram Repellent
3. Bobbex Concentrated Deer Repellent

Mechanical deterrents:

1. Obit 62100 Yard Enforcer Motion Activated Sprinkler
2. Gardener 6050 DeerBlock Deer Netting and Fencing
3. Nite Guard Solar NG-001 Predator Control Light
4. Garden Secrets Solar Ultrasonic Animal Repellent

Types of Deer Repellents Discussed

There are a variety of deer repellent methods, and they all help prevent deer from wandering through your lawn and nibbling on your garden. You can choose from physical deterrents, chemical repellents, motion-sensing options, and more. The most effective strategies usually combine a deer repellent with other methods, like

creating barriers with raised garden beds and choosing plants that deter deer. Using a combination of methods can help keep your lawn and garden deer-free.

Mechanical Repellents

Mechanical repellents and physical barriers deer-proof your garden and lawn without using chemicals. These repellents work by blocking the deer's path or scaring the deer. Common mechanical repellents include walls, fencing, and deer netting.

Walls and fencing keep deer out. When installing deer-proof fencing, consider height, placement, and strength. Deer are strong animals, and some can jump as high as 8 feet.

Mesh deer netting is less expensive than constructed walls and fences. It is nearly invisible, so it feels less obtrusive. It is less durable than a wall or fence, but it's a budget-friendly alternative to building new fencing.

Electronic Devices

Electronic deer repellents may rely on solar power, batteries, or plug-in power to operate. Electronic repellents include motion-activated devices, like sprinklers and lights.

Motion-sensing sprinklers shoot a burst of water when they detect motion. The surprise scares the deer and sends them running. One downside of motion-sensing sprinklers is that they can accidentally spray an unlucky pet or person. They also need a water source and run the risk of freezing in cold winters.

Most deer aren't fans of bright lights. Some deer repellent lights detect motion and shine a light to startle the deer; however, deer repellent lights are only effective at night.

Ultrasonic Devices

Like electronic devices, ultrasonic devices need a power source. Most often the source is either batteries or built-in solar power. However, they work using a specific pest deterrent method: ultrasonic frequencies.

Ultrasonic pest control devices emit high-frequency sounds to deter pests. These sounds are usually too high for the human ear to hear.

Ultrasonic deer repellents are a humane and noninvasive deterrent option. Some combine ultrasonic technology with motion sensors and lights to scare deer away.

Taste-Based Repellents

Taste-based repellents leave an unappetizing layer of flavor on your plants; your plants still look great, but they taste undesirable to deer. Common ingredients include spicy chili peppers and bitter chemicals. After a quick nibble, a deer will realize these greens aren't anything it wants to munch on.

These types of repellents usually come in concentrates or sprays and are applied directly to the plant. While most sprays are semi-weatherproof, it's important to

remember that these repellents will wash off over time. Most of these repellents will need reapplication at least every few weeks.

Scent-Based Repellents

Deer have a strong sense of smell that they use to detect predators, so scent-based repellents can help keep deer away.

Some repellents use smells that are unpleasant to deer but tolerable for humans, like peppermint or clove. Others have a foul or dangerous scent, such as rotten eggs or predator (i.e. Coyote or wolf) urine. Scent-based repellents deter deer from coming near your garden (not even for a nibble!) and keeps them away from your prized plants.

What to Consider When Choosing the Best Deer Repellent

The best deer repellent will depend on your yard and your preferences. First, consider whether you might be looking for a permanent or a temporary option. Next, decide if a deterrent device or a taste- or a scent-based product is best for your lawn or garden. Here are some factors to consider when choosing the best deer repellent.

Natural vs. Chemical

Sprays, concentrates, and granular deer repellents can contain natural or chemical ingredients. Both types of repellents deter deer by affecting their sense of smell or taste. Some may cause a bit of pain, but without causing any harm.

Chemical deer repellents use synthetic chemicals to deter deer. These repellents often aren't safe to use on plants you plan to eat. It is also important to consider pets or children who may come into contact with chemical repellents in the garden. Natural repellents can include home remedies and naturally derived commercial products. Common ingredients include putrescent egg solids, garlic oil, and capsaicin. These products are usually biodegradable, making them an eco-friendly option. While naturally derived repellents may be a safer option if children and pets come in contact with the garden, not all natural repellents are safe to use on edible plants.

Form

Deer repellents come in a variety of forms: You can choose from physical deterrents, barriers, granules, sprays, concentrates, and ultrasonic devices. Your choice may depend on whether you'd like a permanent solution, like a fence, or a temporary solution, like sprays or granules.

When it comes to physical repellents, aesthetics are one aspect to consider. If you don't like the look of a fence or deer netting, you can choose a repellent device

instead. But keep in mind that some physical repellents need a power source, like electricity, battery power, or solar power, and sprinkler repellents need a water source.

When choosing a scent- or taste-based repellent, safety is a common concern. Sprays, liquid concentrates, and granular repellents are made from a range of different ingredients. When treating a veggie patch, or if there are pets or children in the household, nontoxic options are a prudent choice.

Scent

Scent is a strong deterrent for many deer. Some deer repellents use threatening scents, such as the smell of blood or predator urine. Other repellents smell just plain gross to deer, turning them off to the area.

The problem with some deer repellents is that they don't smell bad only to deer; they can smell pretty funky to humans as well. Deer repellents made from ingredients like putrescent eggs or predator urine can smell awful to both deer and humans.

Consider looking for a deer repellent that uses ingredients like peppermint or clove oils. These are examples of scents that deer dislike but don't bother most people. They can repel deer without creating a stink in your garden.

Weather Conditions

Weather conditions can affect some types of deer repellents. Physical deterrents like fencing and netting are pretty much unaffected by weather. Most electronic options are weatherproof, but it is important to double-check that feature if you live in a rainy or snowy area.

Motion-sensing sprinklers are a great repellent option but aren't the optimal for climates that dip below freezing. Since they rely on a water source, they can freeze in wintry weather. It's a good idea to take in sprinklers in freezing weather to prevent any damage to the hose or sprinkler.

When it comes to sprays, rain and snow will wash them away over time. It's important to re-treat your garden according to the repellent instructions. If you don't, you might have some sneaky deer on your hands after a bout of heavy rain.

Longevity

Some deer repellent options are more permanent than others. A fence will take a lot more initial cost and effort, but it can offer a long-lasting solution. Liquids and granules will have a smaller upfront cost but will need reapplication.

Devices like sprinklers and lights are a great in-between option. These devices are flexible and semi-permanent. Some gardeners recommend moving them around occasionally to make the deterrent unpredictable and confuse deer. But they can also be left in place if they are effective where they are.

Options like sprays or granules have the least longevity, and they need more frequent reapplication.

Mobility

If you plan on expanding your garden, it helps to have a movable deer repellent option. Fences and walls are a more permanent option and will take some disassembling to move around.

Deer netting is a physical barrier that is much more flexible than fencing, and you can rearrange netting fences to accommodate changes. Another option is to use the netting as a drape on top of individual plants or areas; it stops deer from nibbling and is easy to move around.

Sprinklers and lights also are a mobile option. They'll require some installation work, but they are generally easy to move where you need them. Sprays, concentrates, and granules are the most flexible option. They are quick to apply and are used directly on the plants.

Versatility

Many deer repellents don't only deter deer; they can work on other critters as well. Some taste- and scent-based repellents repel other pests, like rabbits, raccoons, skunks, and rodents. (editors note: Unfortunately they don't always work well on two legged pests!)

Ultrasonic devices and motion-sensing sprinklers and lights can deter many pests. Some have the option to customize sensitivity and range settings, so you can repel critters from the smallest bunny to the tallest deer.

Most deer repellents are safe to use on a wide variety of garden plants. But when it comes to plants you intend to eat, it's important to use a nontoxic repellent. You can find deer repellents that are safe to use directly on fruits and vegetables.

If you have any questions feel free to call me:

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