



yes, you can deer proof your yard

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Column: Yes, you can deer proof your yard
By Paul Jones

We've answered a broad spectrum of client questions over the past 35 years, some of them book-grade material. Professional joke writers would love our call records. There's every subject you can think of. Questions such as "Why are my leaves falling?" -- on the October call log -- and on and on.

In recent years, however, the overwhelming topic has been "deer," and the talk has gotten serious. The problem that everyone needs solved involves deer. The popular question is "What can I plant that deer will not eat?" Or, "how can I stop them from eating what I already planted? Help!

"The correct answer is certainly not in planting what deer will not eat for several very good reasons:

- Deer will eat just about anything at least once.
- Things deer will not eat do not make a complete landscape planting.
- Treating the symptom is never as effective as treating the cause of the problem.

We try to give complete and scientific answers to all our inquiries, and here is how we approach deer.

First, identify the problem, which includes the facts that there are way too many deer and that they have become far too comfortable in close contact with human scent and activities. Several generations have been raised virtually in our backyards without natural fear. By nature, deer are curious about both scent and taste and will experiment with both. They will taste just about anything out of curiosity and hunger if they continue to be comfortable in and around your yard. It's also important to note that deer are very much directed by habit, live in a small environment and have very regular routes of travel.

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Then, determine the solution. A major component of that is to make them less comfortable around your yard and change their habits. Change the path they take from sleeping to eating areas. Change their curiosity to fear. Fool their sense of smell and taste, repulse them, and you have the answer to your problem. Remember, deer have a sense of smell about 800 times more sensitive than yours, a survival strength. You must turn their strength into a weakness.

I live in the woods. I have 500 acres of woods and corn as neighbors, and deer do not eat any of my 70-plus hostas, or my Asiatic lilies, or my roses, or my flowering crab trees and certainly not any other food I would be foolish enough to put out for them.

They do not like my yard anymore. They no longer come here. Their trail has moved just far enough so that my yard is no longer on their primary runway. My plants no longer are a food source, my planters no longer a bed.

How did I accomplish this miracle? Can I do it for you, and more importantly, can you do it for yourself? The answers: easy, yes and yes.

First, I made my yard smell bad. I spread Milorganite on the grass and planters and placed systemic pellets on every susceptible shrub, flower and tree. I topically spray each plant with Liquid Fence each month. This makes the entire area a negative smell zone. You can't smell it; to deer it is a living nightmare. Remember, 800 to 1. It does not take too long to change their habits. Hint: a fine misting of wolf urine around the border will shorten their learning time from months to minutes.

I also have employed a series of scent attractant stakes at the outside border they are allowed. Each stake smells like a favorite food, but it is a wick and it tricks the deer into touching it with their tongues, whereupon they get shocked by a small flashlight battery that lasts nearly a year.

Now, they hate my yard. They have taught their children to hate it as well. They have changed their habits, and we now live together in peace. I watch them walk by on their way to the neighbor who thinks they need feeding from human hands. Problem solved.

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