

UNFAIR GAME

HERE'S HOW TO KEEP DEER FROM RAVAGING YOUR LANDSCAPE

There are two places you want to see deer this time of year: grazing happily in a plowed field or in the cross-hairs of a 30.06-caliber hunting rifle.

More likely, you're apt to see them running in front of your car or grazing in your landscape. Each can be traumatic and expensive.

Let's face it: Michigan's famed white-tailed deer is a majestic animal, but not well-mannered when it comes to food.

Many cherished landscape plants are fair game — hosta, rhododendron, yews and the tender buds of trees.

Landscape aficionado Kevin

Haik knows this well.

The Cannon Township man loses the bottom third of his arborvitaes each year to grazing deer. His daughter recently



JOHN HOGAN

DIGGIN' IN

clipped one with the family car not far from their home. The startled deer kept running, as did the car, thankfully.

Haik, 50, will do his part to cull the herd as he heads out this morning for opening day of Michigan's 16-day firearm deer season.

"There are a lot of deer running around here," said Haik, a retired Steelcase Inc. employee who runs a handyman business. "I'd rather get one with a gun than with my car. I just hope feeding damage this winter isn't too bad."

He's not alone. Thousands of West Michigan residents annually go to great lengths to keep deer from damaging the landscape.

Deer repellents, deer fences, scare devices and predator scents are part of a multimillion-dollar business.

Many nurseries even highlight plants that are said to be deer-resistant, notably those with fuzzy or spiny leaves. Prickly pear cactus and Lamb's ear are examples of perennials deer avoid.

For spring bulb enthusiasts, consider planting daffodils, which deer generally disdain.

It's all good advice for people with yards under construction, but doesn't do much for those with established landscapes rich in deer-appetizing entrees.

Fortunately, there are myriad products to keep deer from pursuing garden plants with reckless abandon.

Products such as Deer Stopper, Scoot Deer, Shotgun and DeFence tout their effectiveness in keeping deer from browsing our prized plants. The names are even sort of catchy.



FILE PHOTOS

Brash behavior: Deer are getting bolder as they search for food.



A gentler answer: Large orange flowers of *Asclepias tuberosa*, or butterfly weed, are dependable summer bloomers and not palatable to deer. This member of the milkweed family blooms from July through September.

Raising a stink

"We have several customers who are quite happy with the coyote urine," said Kathy Rohm, lawn and garden department manager at the Fruit Basket Flowerland store on Alpine Avenue NW. "I sell a lot of it."

Perhaps clarification is necessary. Rohm is talking about coyote urine in granule or processed liquid form used as a deer repellent.

The product triggers the fear and flight instincts in deer because coyotes are a natural predator of deer.

"The urine can be put in dispensers and placed around the garden," said Gayle Reynolds, a sales consultant with Leg Up Enterprises, the Lovell, Maine-based manufacturer of several predator scents. "With the liquid, hit a tree with it like a coyote urinates; wild animals respond to it."

Humans, too, for that matter.

Repellents with less-than-pleasant aromas are numerous, but in many cases, the unpleasant aroma is short-lived.

Take Liquid Fence, for example. The liquid concentrate can make eyes water. But once diluted and applied, the obnoxious odor wears off, at least for humans.

Blame (or credit) putrescent egg solids and garlic for the awful smell. It works on scent so deer and rabbits "don't even have to take a bite to be repelled," according to the Liquid Fence Co., of Brodheadsville, Pa. "Once it dries, the odor will not be noticeable to humans."

On the other end of the spectrum is sweet-smelling Deer Stopper from Messina Wildlife Products. Its secret? Rosemary and mint oil. The repellent relies on plant extracts

THE LIST

Deer-resistant plants

Looking to add new plants to the yard that will not be mowed down by deer? Here are a few suggestions, with this caveat: Hungry deer will eat just about anything.

Perennials: Columbine, coreopsis, bleeding heart, coral bells, iris, lavender, Russian sage, thyme, yarrow, most ferns and ornamental grasses

Shrubs: Barberry, butterfly bush, boxwood, beautyberry, rose of Sharon, holly, spirea, viburnum and weigela

Trees: Kousa dogwood, many species of birch, some maples, spruce and pine trees

to confront deer "by using their natural repulsion to certain plant smells and tastes rather than relying on fear of predator tactics," said company founder James Messina.

"We know deer will eat more than 500 different types of plants," Messina said. "Normally, they're quite discriminating, but in fall and winter they become less picky and much more of a threat to suburban landscapes."

Deer rely on taste and smell to determine if food may be harmful, which is why repellents applied directly to plants often will send deer on their way after the initial encounter.

But for long-term control, deer need to be trained,



PRESS FILE PHOTO

Damage done: Kristin Tindall, ecology education coordinator at Blandford Nature Center, examines plants, including maple saplings, damaged by a growing deer herd.

Messina said.

"Fall is the time to act to substantially reduce deer damage to your landscape this winter," he said. "Fend off deer by applying repellents before you see the damage, encouraging the deer to move along and not include your landscape in their browse buffet."

Staying power

Generations of people have relied on aluminum pie plates or small-sized motel soaps, even old pantyhose stuffed with human hair, to keep deer on edge.

It may work for a while, but, eventually, the deer catch on to this ruse and start their eating.

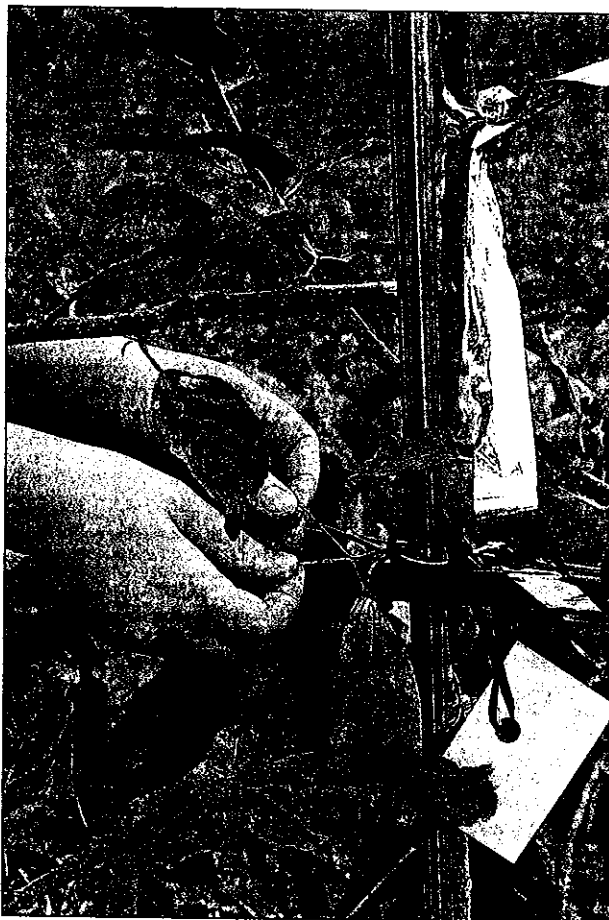
This is why many seasoned veterans recommend having a broad arsenal of deer-scare products as part of an overall strategy.

People who are not keen on applying deer repellents after every rain or trying to keep pump sprayers from freezing in mid-spray during winter may be heartened to know that several repellents are labeled weather-resistant. That's the idea behind Scoot Deer & Rabbit's micro-encapsulated, time-released repellent.

Animal activity breaks micro-beads that hold the active ingredients, releasing a full dose of odor that drives critters away.

If all else fails, build a barrier — it is the most effective long-term solution, said Rohm, the assistant manager at Fruit Basket Flowerland.

"I tell people to think about



Mishmash: All sorts of objects are tied to the young apple trees to keep deer away.

using burlap around their arborvitae, or poultry netting, hardware cloth around tree trunks," she said.

Deer may not necessarily feed on tree trunks, but bucks rubbing antlers up and down the tender trunks of newly

planted trees usually leave them in a world of hurt.

The buck stops here

Part of a broad-based strategy to keep deer out can include tin pans, scarecrows, even motion detectors that activate lights,

THE LIST

Oh, deer!

Deer repellents are varied, but available. Here is a list of products available at garden centers and online.

Liquid Fence Deer & Rabbit Repellent

Cost: \$35 for a 32-ounce bottle of concentrate, which makes 4 gallons of repellent
What's in it: putrescent egg solids and garlic
Contact: (800) 923-3623, liquidfence.com.

Sweeny's All Out Deer & Rabbit Repellent

Cost: \$21.99 for a 32-ounce bottle
What's in it: habenero pepper, garlic oils and butyl mercaptin, which emits a sulfurous odor "and acts on the deer and rabbits' sense of fear, triggering a flight response."
Contact: (800) 837-7644, wrsweeney.com

All Season Weatherproof Deer Repellent

Cost: 6 pack is \$29.99
What's in it: Dried blood formula housed in a single-pronged "repellent station" you stick into the ground
Contact: (800) 837-7644, wrsweeney.com

Real Coyote Urine Ground Cover Deception Scent liquid

Cost: \$18.99 for 8-ounce bottle with three dispensers
What's in it: This product, from Leg Up Enterprises of Lovell, Maine, works on the theory that predatory scent scares off deer.
Contact: (800) 218-1749, legupenterprises.com

Shotgun Repels All Animal Repellent

Cost: \$27.99 for 32-ounce container
What's in it: Consists of dried blood, and including putrescent whole egg solids and garlic oil.
Contact: bonide.com

DeFence Rabbit & Deer Repellent

Cost: \$12.99 for 32-ounce, ready-to-use formula
What's in it: Consists of putrescent whole egg solids.
Contact: (800) 800-1819, havahart.com

Deer Stopper

Cost: \$12.99 for a 32-ounce, ready-to-use spray bottle
What's in it: Rosemary oil and mint oil
Contact: (888) 411-3337, messinawildlife.com

Scoot Deer

Cost: \$16.95 for 32-ounce bottle
What's in it: Micro-encapsulated, time-released repellent; water resistant; animal activity breaks micro-beads that hold the active ingredients, releasing a full-dose of odor that drives them away.
Contact: (800) 460-7378, scootproducts.com

GreenScreen Deer & Rabbit Repellent

Cost: \$34.95 for 40 2-ounce bags
What's in it: Ready-to-use bags of blood meal and red pepper powder you hang in areas of feeding damage; lasts three to six months.
Contact: (800) 968-9453, greenscreenl.com

alarms or sprinklers when deer enter the yard. A barking dog also is quite effective, though your neighbors might not appreciate it.

The key to success is to mix it up; don't let deer become acclimated to just one deterrent.

Relocate the clanging tin pans, move motion sensors and try different repellents to keep deer on their hooves.

Some people use homemade repellents using 20 percent whole eggs and 80 percent water.

Take a page from the professionals: Many deer repellents

rely on putrescent egg solids and capsaicin, the ingredient in hot peppers that makes your mouth burn.

Dried blood meal also has been used successfully. And let's not discount human hair.

Ken Kloostra, owner of Mr. Hair in Standale, for years has given away sweepings from his barber shop floor to patrons with deer problems.

"I have people who swear by it," Kloostra said. "I know I've never had a deer come inside my shop."

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