

Protecting Your Garden From Critters



1. Plant what they don't like.

In general, deer and rabbits don't like plants that have strong scents, spines, prickles or fuzzy/leathery leaves. Some gardeners suggest oregano, rosemary, rhubarb, asparagus, or garlic, however, what/how much they eat depends a lot on the season, the particular plant, the weather and the availability of other foods. There are many lists of deer-resistant plants, but the more hungry they are, the less selective they'll be.

2. Repel with smell and taste.

Repellents discourage them from feeding either because they have a bad taste or a noxious smell. Rotten eggs, garlic, blood meal and sulfur seem to be the most effective deterrents vs. repellents with a bitter or spicy taste.

Repellents work best as soon as you see deer or rabbit damage. Make sure you follow directions and reapply as recommended. Most gardeners get the best results through consistent applications and by rotating repellents. If you continue to see damage, switch to a different repellent, or try a frightening device.

3. Frighten them away.

Animals are always on the alert for predators (coyotes, wolves, dogs, people) and sudden, unexpected noises will send them running. Predator urine or dried blood products fall under this category.

Noise/Movement: The challenge is to keep the critters from becoming accustomed to the noise/movement, so move the devices around to different places in your garden. Try reflective streamers that move in the wind or motion-sensors that send a shot of water in their direction. A barking dog can be a good deterrent, but only if it poses a true threat. Deer and rabbits will ignore non-stop barkers that are corralled or tethered.

4. Create a physical barrier.

Metal fencing is the most permanent and reliable critter-control solution. An effective fence needs be at least 3' (rabbits) to 7' (deer) high staked securely to wood or metal posts, and go all the way to the ground. Put a flashing near the fence base so rabbits can't sneak under them. In areas with very severe deer problems, you can add a second fence several feet outside the main fence. Deer generally dislike entering a small, confined area and tend to jump fences only if they see a clear landing spot.

You can also wrap shrubs with black nylon netting or nylon window screening to reduce winter browsing. In the vegetable garden, you can also protect plants from being eaten with a tightly secured layer of garden fabric or shade netting.