



## Deer Damage and Control

Deer damage or feed on a wide variety of fruits and vegetables such as cole crops, lettuce, grapes, corn, pumpkins, berries, tomatoes, fruit trees and other plants. Because white-tailed deer lack upper incisor teeth, the damaged leaves and twigs or stems have jagged edges, compared with a clean-cut surface left by rodents and rabbit feeding. Vegetables are readily eaten and entire gardens may be destroyed. Sweet corn tips are eaten, including the silk and one to two inches of the ear but occasionally plants are grazed to the ground. In addition, deer trample many crops as they move about the field.

Deer are active in Connecticut year-round. Breeding occurs from October to December. Fawns are born in May and June weighing about eight pounds at birth and increasing in weight over the next six to seven years. Peak feeding activity occurs in early morning and late evening; thus, deer may damage the garden without being seen. Damage by deer in Connecticut is increasing as residential development forces deer into smaller and smaller habitats and wild food sources decrease.

Deer are protected during all times of the year except various hunting seasons or by obtaining special crop damage permits. All methods of destroying deer such as using traps, poisons, toxic baits, etc. are dangerous to domestic animals and individuals and may result in liability for damage and poor public relations.



Doe and Fawns by Lisa Rivers, 2012

## Nonchemical Control

- Hunting during the legal season or with special permits will help reduce deer populations. Homeowners can obtain hunting permits, although there are restrictive rules that limit their availability. To find out more contact the Division of Wildlife, Department of Energy & Environmental Protection, 79 Elm Street, Hartford, CT at 860-424-3011 or at [CT DEEP Deer Hunting Seasons site](#).
- Fences are the best non-lethal way to protect a field from deer damage. For large areas, wire fences should be at least eight feet high and can be made using two, four-foot widths of welded wire fencing joined one on top of the other. A high voltage electric fence can be effective if properly maintained. Several commercial styles and systems are available, but costs are high.
- Plant highly susceptible crops as far from wooded cover as possible. This method provides only slight protection at best since deer forage over a large area.

## Nonchemical Repellents

- Bars of fragrant soap will keep deer from crops at critical times. The best soap to us is the small, heavily perfumed individually wrapped bars. Leave the wrapper on the bar, drill a small hole through the soap and hang from stakes or plants around the perimeter of the field. The repellent is short-lived as deer become accustomed to fragrances. Remove soap when protection is no longer required.
- Animal specialists state that a mixture of a dozen eggs and five gallons of water can be applied to the ground using a pressure sprayer. The deer are repelled by the odor as the eggs rot in the ground but humans will not detect it. This mixture will cover approximately one acre. Reapplication is necessary after each rainfall. Do not allow egg shells in the mixture or the sprayer may become clogged. Fermented whole egg solids are commercially available from garden supply stores. Consult the label for directions.
- A half-and-half mixture of bone meal plus blood meal may effectively repel deer for a limited time. Several reports indicate blood meal by itself may be effective. These materials are available at garden centers and can be hung in small bags around the field.
- Noise making devices and lights may discourage deer but results are erratic and long-term effectiveness is unlikely. Permits are needed for many noise making devices.
- Human hair placed in nylon stockings or plastic bags with holes punched in them can be hung from stakes or plants around the field. Results have been erratic in repellency tests. Human hair can be obtained from barber shops.
- A by-product of the poultry industry called feathermeal (ground chicken feathers) can be used similarly. These materials are effective only during warm weather and durability is from two to six weeks.
- Commercial or home-made hot pepper sauce is available to repel various animals. Use two tablespoons of hot sauce in 12½ gallons of water with a retention additive (Wilt-Pruf or Vapor-Gard) and spray onto vegetation. Apply when animals first start to feed. Animals attempting to eat treated plant material will not be harmed and the hot sensation in their mouth and throat will discourage further feeding. Consult label for complete directions and restrictions before use.
- Urine of large predators (bobcat, cougars or coyotes) is reported to be very effective in preventing deer damage. Do not apply directly to foliage or edible parts. A disadvantage of these materials is that they do not weather well. Frequent reapplication may be necessary.

## Chemical Control

Ammonium salt soaps of higher fatty acids are odor repellents that can be applied directly to plants. They are effective but are easily washed off by rainfall. These materials can be applied in combination with normal pesticide applications but are not effective when applied to bare ground. Consult label for details and directions.

Many of these methods are effective for only short period of time because deer adjust to them. Combinations of methods may provide better long-term results.

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