

Browsers of the Garden Buffet: Strategies for Dealing With Deer
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Feeding Deer

The [Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources](#) states that in Virginia it is illegal to feed deer for any reason from September 1 to the first Saturday in January. It is illegal to feed deer year-round in several Virginia counties including Fairfax, Loudon, and Prince William Counties.

There are several reasons that people should not feed deer.

1. Deer usually travel in small groups. When many deer congregate in one area it makes it easier for diseases such as Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and Tuberculosis to spread from one herd to another. While CWD is not yet in Arlington County, it has been found in neighboring Fairfax County. It spreads very easily through urine, saliva, and feces and remains active in the soil for a lengthy period of time.
2. Feeding deer can make them to lose their fear of humans, with some experts warning that as they become accustomed to having food provided by people, they might become aggressive in their demands for food.
3. Deer can be harmed by the food offered by people. Nature provides high fiber foods that are easily digested by the deer's microbiome. Low fiber and high carbohydrate foods, such as corn, can upset the digestive system causing deer to become ill or die from diarrhea and dehydration. Diets rich in corn can cause deformities like foundering hooves, which makes it difficult for deer to walk. Also, deer can be poisoned by grain or corn contaminated by a fungus, aflatoxin.
4. Deer feeding often attracts undesirable animals such as rats, raccoons, and coyotes.
5. Behavioral patterns are changed when people feed deer. Deer may alter their travel, causing them to cross highways, increasing the opportunity for deer-vehicle collisions.
6. When a group of deer gather at a feeding site, there is competition for which deer get the food. The weakest deer and fawns are least likely to have access to the food.
7. It isn't neighborly to feed deer, as they will also enjoy plants at nearby homes.
8. Deer are wildlife that should be able to manage without the assistance of people. It is important that natural habitats be able to support our deer population.

Regarding laser perimeter guards

A laser perimeter guard would work if it activated some other deterrent that would scare the deer, such as a strong water spray.

Regarding collection of predator urine

Predator urine is collected via floor collection drains in pens and cages housing coyotes, foxes, bobcats and other animals. There are questions about the conditions of animals in these situations.

In reference to the comments about using Milorganite to deter deer.

Milorganite is the biosolids left from waste water treatment creating a non-burning, slow-release source fertilizer (6-2-0).

One study at the [University of Georgia](#) found that Milorganite reduced deer damage but didn't eliminate it. Its effectiveness was dependent upon weather conditions, deer pressure and availability of other food resources.

In researching Milorganite I came across this study involving PFAS by the [Sierra Club](#). Researchers recommend that home gardeners not use biosolid-based fertilizers on vegetables and fruits to minimize risk of exposure to the chemicals.

In reference to the question about who to contact about deer.

In Arlington County you can contact the [Animal Welfare League](#).

The [Arlington County Board](#) is considering how to manage the deer population. You can email your comments and concerns about the deer population to the individual members at countyboard@arlingtonva.us



Regarding fencing

Fencing is the most reliable way to keep deer out. Remember, deer can jump a 10' fence but prefer to go under or through it. Also, be sure to securely anchor all fencing to the ground. It is important to install any fencing before planting. If a deer knows there are good eats inside the fenced area, they may go ahead and jump the fence for a meal.

Wire mesh fencing in areas of high deer pressure is usually effective at 8'. This is the only sure-fire way to keep deer out and is often used by commercial growers of vegetables or orchards

Tall polypropylene mesh fences usually keep deer out at a 7' height where deer pressure is light to moderate. They work well with smaller spaces such as home vegetable gardens, landscaping and with individual plants. These fences need to be flagged with cloth strips to alert deer so they don't bound into them.

A wooden, stockade fence can be 5-6' tall. This type of fence works because deer can't see the interior area to know that desirable plants are growing inside. They are cautious and don't like to jump into an area they can't view because they don't know if there is a predator hiding inside or what the escape routes might be.

Double fencing is another option. Space two 4-5' fences 4-5' apart. Deer have poor depth perception and don't like jumping over the two fences. You can combine a hedge and a fence for the same effect.

Micro-enclosures are small fenced areas that work because they present a psychological deterrent. Deer don't like entering small spaces that restrict their quick entry and exit. 8x6' spaces have successfully kept deer out with 50" high fences.

Peanut-butter electric fences provide a psychological barrier rather than a physical one. According to the Humane Society of The United States, deer receive a "mild jolt" to their nose or tongue when they touch the fence. These fences "are powered by high-voltage, low-amperage chargers that provide timed pulses of short duration." The charge is not dangerous but it will get your attention. The rule of thumb is that amperage kills and voltage get your attention. These fences have about 120 milliamps. By comparison a typical house circuit has 13 amps. Guidance suggests that pets and children should be taught to avoid the fence.