

Oh, Deer!
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Those audacious, crepuscular ruminants are everywhere! And using the term ‘deer proofing’ is just this side of an oxymoron, but deer proofing is a must if plant survival is a concern. Where to begin? Two 10 foot fences with an inner moat might be a sound choice. But there are less expensive options: repellants, fencing, scare tactics and incorporating ‘deer resistant’ plants into your landscape.

Repellants are short term solutions. They consist primarily of stinky, yucky sprays that will deter deer for obvious reasons. Concoctions using fish fertilizer, Tabasco, eggs, blood, and liquid soap are a few suggested ingredients. Plants need to be sprayed regularly (especially after rain).

Fencing is the most effective and the higher the better (8 – 10 feet) if using heavy duty wire mesh or nylon netting. Solid wood fences can be shorter (6 ft), deer are high jumpers, but they won’t jump something they can’t see into (most likely). Electric fences are another option (WSU suggests baiting them with peanut butter—one lick and they’re off).

Ah, scare tactics: bright lights, noisemakers, explosives, motion detecting sprinklers, a HUGE dog. The Dept. of Fish and Wildlife suggests a predator’s urine or droppings (good luck with that). If your neighbors are congenial, some of these options might work. Temporarily! Deer can grow accustomed to the novelty of it all and after an initial fright or two, they’ll be back nibbling on your plants and walking away with a full belly and shaking their heads in disbelief. Sheesh!

The bottom line: if deer are hungry they’re going to eat. They eat up to 10 pounds of food/day; enough to keep the four chambers of their stomach happy. Minus canine or incisor teeth, they simply grab the plant with their bottom teeth and hard upper palate and rip it off. There’s nothing kind or gentle about it. But there are deer resistant plants to consider: ferns, ornamental grasses, most conifers, plants with hairy or fuzzy foliage, smelly plants (mint, lemony, etc) or bitter plants are good choices. There are many internet sites with long lists of suggested “deer resistant” plants for Washington State. Good luck in keeping these persistent opportunists at bay.