Cornell investigates Milorganite's effectiveness vs. deer

Research has shown that the fertilizer Milorganite may be used to discourage deer browsing. Milorganite may offer some relief from deer damage and applied research has been initiated to qualify the product's effectiveness in an urban area where deer predation is a problem.

A study at Cornell University's Cooperative Extension Service in Dutchess County, N.Y., is attempting to quantify the result of using Milorganite as an effective deer deterrent. Thusfar, the study indicates it is effective in deterring deer from browsing on valuable ornamental plants and shrubs. Milwaukee has produced the 100-percent natural organic fertilizer product, a co-product of the city's wastewater treatment process.

Initial results of the Cornell deer study show Milorganite has deterred deer from browsing on Hosta and Fennia (yews) when the fertilizer is applied around the target shrubs' base. The rate of application is at five pounds per 100 square feet. Milorganite is broadcast on the soil surface around the target plant material.

According to the study, Milorganite should be applied one to two times per month and after each snowfall in the winter months. The researchers feel the scent of the product may be the reason the deer choose to browse elsewhere. Les Hulcoop, Cooperative Extension agent for Dutchess County, who is captaining the study, said, "The deer are definitely staying away from the Milorganite applications at this time. We feel some of the commercially labeled treatments on the market do quite well in checking deer damage, but the plants grow out of the protection during spring and summer. Additionally, the users do not like the white film some of these treatments leave on the growing plant material."

Many of the deer repellent treatments lose their effectiveness in winter after temperatures fall below 10 degrees F.

The study will also assess predation control if Milorganite is hung in bags from the target plants throughout the winter.

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