

Milorganite as a Deer Deterrent

by Terry Ward

Milorganite may enjoy success in a totally different application, in addition to being the premiere turf fertilizer. For many years, Milorganite has been used to discourage deer browsing by garden centers, landscapers and golf courses in New England where it is used as both a fertilizer and deer deterrent. Residents of many urban areas throughout the U.S. with growing numbers of deer can attest to the amount of damage browsing deer can do to shrubs and ornamental plants. 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, Dutchess County, New York, is attempting to quantify the result of using Milorganite as an effective deer deterrent. Thus far, the study indicates that not only is Milorganite an effective fertilizer, but it is deterring deer from browsing on valuable ornamental plants and shrubs. A major television news feature on deer damage in the study area was recently reported on ABC television's Nightly News.

For decades, Milwaukee, Wisconsin has held the title of beer capitol of the world. As quiet as it has been kept, Milwaukee has also pioneered its way through the turf grass industry with Milorganite fertilizer. The city has produced the 100% natural organic fertilizer product, a co-product of the city's waste water treatment process, since 1926 making Milorganite the real "grandfather" of all fertilizers in the turf industry.

The Cornell deer study shows Milorganite has deterred deer from browsing on Hosta and Taxus (yews) when the fertilizer is applied around the target shrubs' base. The rate of application is at five lbs. per 100 sq. ft. The 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. Milorganite can offer consumers its fertilizer benefits while acting as an environmentally sensitive method of discouraging deer. The researchers feel that the scent of the product may be the reason the deer choose to browse elsewhere.

While the demonstration is still in the initial stages, the results strongly indicate that Milorganite can offer the consumer a premium natural organic fertilizer product as well as a quality, highly effective deer deterrent.

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 that 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.

The study is to continue and data will be collected for an additional year.

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