

From soap to hot sauce, deer damage prevention gets creative

Landscape managers have to use their imaginations, a regularly changing combination of both taste and scent repellents, and fences.

■ Bambi, loved by millions of Americans, is becoming a landscape destroyer.

Bambi is the northern white-tailed deer. She nips off the soft tips of twigs, and munches branches and shoots no thicker than a match stick. Unfortunately, some of the plants she finds appetizing are valuable trees and plants in our landscapes.

The problem: too many deer.

Populations are at historically high levels in many areas of the country, particularly east of the Mississippi.

"The deer pressure is getting so high that the food source is getting very, very low," says Les Hulcoop, cooperative extension agent for Dutchess County, N.Y.

Unfortunately, as deer populations rise, deer habitat shrinks as people subdi-

vide prime deer browsing locations into suburban home sites and office parks.

It's no wonder that deer are increasingly invading landscapes. They're hungry.

Todd Mizen discovered this last April when, after a late-spring snow, deer chomped off all emerging tulips at the woodlot-encircled, three-acre office site he helps maintain just southwest of Cleveland.

Mizen, like other landscape managers, can't do much to keep it from happening again and again. These deer live in small woodlots surrounding the office, not in an area where they can be harvested during Ohio's brief deer season. Indeed, some of the office employees or neighbors probably wouldn't stand for it even if they could be taken.

"When you talk about deer, you're talking about a controversial subject," admits



Feeding by white-tailed deer distorted the shapes of these evergreens at the Holden Arboretum.

Hulcoop, who has been investigating the deer-repellent properties of the fertilizer Milorganite. "On one hand, people don't

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Todd Mizen sprays a homemade mixture, hoping that the deer in a nearby woodlot find it too 'hot' for their taste.

Products to keep deer, landscapes apart

■ Just about any type of fence, provided it's at least eight feet high and there are no gaps in it, will keep deer from landscape plants. But fences look like fences..

A newer product on the market, **Benner's Deer Fence**, is a dark mesh polypropylene material that can be strung from tree to tree around a property or planting, and it's not as obtrusive, say users. Contact: Benner's Gardens Inc., P.O. Box 875, Bala-Cynwyd, PA 19004; phone (800) 753-4660.

Some popular taste or scent products used to repel deer from landscapes include:

- **Deer-Away**, Deer Away, 712 15th Ave., NE, Minneapolis, MN 55413.
- **Gustafson 42-S Thiram Fungicide and Repellent**, Gustafson Inc., P.O. Box 660065, Dallas, TX 75266.
- **Hinder**, Necessary Trading Company, 422 Salem Ave., New Castle, VA 24127.
- **Hot Sauce Animal Repellent**, Miller Chemical and Fertilizer Corporation, PO Box 333, Radio Road, Hanover, Pa 17331.
- **Milorganite**, 1101 N. Market St., Milwaukee, WI 53201-3049.
- **Ro-Pel**, Burlington Bio-Medical & Scientific Corp., 222 Sherwood Ave., Farmingdale, NY 11735.
- **Spotrete 75 WDG Turf Fungicide**, W.A. Cleary Chemical Corp., Southview Industrial Park, 178 Route 522, Suite A, Dayton, NJ 08810.

For an excellent overview of deer damage control, the pamphlet *Controlling Deer Damage in Wisconsin* by Scott Craven and Scott Hygnstrom is a good place to start. Write to Agricultural Bulletin, Room 245, 30 N. Murray St., Madison, WI 53717, or phone (608) 262-3346. There is a small charge for the pamphlet.

want to hurt them. On the other hand, they don't want deer damage."

Mizen tries to discourage deer from eating the *Taxus* near the entrance of his office site with a spray mixture of hot sauce, Wilt Pruf and water.

The spray may or may not work through the winter. He may have to re-apply it. He may have to try another type of repellent.

Most studies show that chemical repellents, even some homemade ones, are about 50 percent effective. That's probably a little bit better than the success rate for collecting human hair at a barber shop and spreading it around specific plants. Or hanging it in bags from branches. Or drilling holes in small bars of deodorant soap and hanging them on the branches of valuable plants. (Leave the wrapper on the soap, it lasts longer, says one landscape manager with deer control experience.)

Jim Mack, superintendent of grounds at Holden Arboretum in wooded northeast Ohio, fights an even bigger battle to protect trees and plants, some of them quite valuable, from deer. The 3,000-acre arboretum, besides being basically an outdoor tree museum, is also a game preserve.

The arboretum's staff protects its valuable trees and gardens with an assortment of fences and aviary netting. Some of the materials Holden Arboretum uses include electric fences around plant nurseries, welded wire fences around some free-standing trees, plastic fencing material in some wooded areas.

Mack acknowledges that fences protect trees and beds, but he questions whether homeowners would find them aesthetically pleasing. Fencing really doesn't solve the bigger deer problem anyway. They just deflect deer to another area, says Mack.

The solution, he believes, is for deer populations to be maintained at numbers that would be in balance with their avail-

able food source.

Beyond that, landscape managers will have to use their imaginations and, perhaps even, a regularly changing combination of both taste and scent repellents along with fences to keep deer from destroying and disfiguring trees and landscape plants, he says.

—Ron Hall



Jim Mack, at the Holden Arboretum, tends a wire mesh fence that keeps deer from this tree.