

Deer control in demand

Some landscape companies offer fences to help clients protect their valuable ornamentals from hungry deer.

By JIM GUYETTE

Landscape managers can earn extra profits by offering deer control services, an item expected to be more in demand as deer populations across the United States climb, and the damage deer do to landscape trees and other landscape plants worsens.

Aggravating the problem is the continuing development of farms and woodlands into housing and commercial developments. This increasingly brings landscaped properties and deer together.

"We're going to be actively marketing this (deer control)," says Donna Elliott of Donna Elliott and Associates, a full-service firm based in Evergreen, Colo. So far she's had success by installing more than 1,000 feet of deer control fencing for several clients. "Most people can live with the turf being eaten, but they draw the line when the deer start eating perennials," she says.

"The deer population's been building over the last several years," explains Jim Mack, landscape operations manager at the 3,100-acre Holden Arboretum, Mentor, Ohio. Mack has installed over 10 miles of

deer fencing after trying other methods of keeping the deer away. "We've tried them all," he admits.

Fall-winter feeders

Deer damage typically begins in the fall and continues until food supplies become abundant again in the spring.

Hungry deer will eat just about any planted material, but seem to be particularly fond of hostas, azaleas, rhododendrons and many different trees.

"When you get into suburban areas there's a huge problem," says Al Benner, Benner's Gardens, Inc., New Hope, Penn. "Deer just come in and chow down. They like to browse on ornamentals. They really seem to do a job on flow-ers and ornamental shrubs. They'll strip them bare."

Benner too thinks the best way of controlling deer is to "keep them out." But most homeowners don't know how to do this.

"By the time you come in the homeowner is completely frustrated. They finally say, 'No mas! I can't take it anymore.'"

Benner says after several successful fencing installations, word that a landscape company can provide deer control



Al Benner, Benner's Gardens, New Hope, PA, shows that the deer fencing, at least installed in a natural setting, is not obtrusive.

will get around. Also, it doesn't hurt to let local extension people know you're offering the service too. You'd be surprised at how many homeowners call extension personnel asking for solutions to the deer problem.

"A lot of people don't even know this service exists," says Benner.

Fence not a distraction

Deer control fencing comes in two sizes. It's lightweight enough to be attached to trees that may already be on a property. Fiberglass, steel or wooden posts can be used also. The dark color usually makes it unobtrusive when installed.

Almost a quarter of the clients of John E. Hoffman Landscaping Inc., Petoskey, Mich., buy deer control services. "After we put in the landscaping we talk to our clients about protection. We don't want to see their plants destroyed," says Hoffman, pres-

ident and CEO.

Hoffman says he has no set fee; he measures the area to be covered and prepares an estimate. Since many of his clients are "summer people" (Petoskey is a popular resort on the shores of Lake Michigan in northern Michigan.) they depend on his firm to protect their landscaping investment while they're away.

The fencing only works when the area to be protected is entirely enclosed. "If someone doesn't seal the area completely, the deer will go under the fence or around it and then they're trapped," warns Benner. "And they'll do anything to get out."

For more information about deer fencing, contact Al Benner at 6974 Upper York Road, New Hope, PA 18938. (800) 753-4660. □

—Jim Guyette is a freelance writer living in northeast Ohio.