

(This document is a work in progress. Please check back in as it gets bigger and better.)

# Seasonal Tips For Gardeners Living With Deer

Gardeners in our subdivision face a challenge: we share our environment with our hungry native deer. We need to keep a realistic, achievable goal in sight: aim to minimize deer damage to your plantings, not to eliminate it.

In general, the best way to minimize deer damage is to train the deer to consider your yard as uninviting territory. This works even better if you enlist neighbors in an effort to create a larger “deer-resistant zone.” While your choice of plants is critical, it is also important to keep up with ongoing deterrence. Below is a seasonal list of ideas to reference throughout the year.

## Winter (Dec/Jan/Feb)

Deer diets include grass, stems, twigs and leftover garden plots. They grow thick fat reserves and thick coats. They shelter in ‘deer yards’ which protect them from harsh weather. They are continually on the move to seek out food and sheltered areas/‘deer yards.’

### Gardening Tips:

- Plan for your spring planting. Research Missouri native species and deer-resistant plants.
- Think about your yard layout. Plan to restrict plantings of deer favorites (like hostas and lilies) to areas deer can’t reach, like fenced back yards.
- Research and consider deer repellent options, including soap bars, sprays, crystals, and odorous organic nitrogen fertilizers. Plan how and when to alternate products.



## Spring (Mar/Apr/May)

Bucks especially rebuild their bodies and antlers by consuming fresh, green vegetation. Bucks lose antlers and shed their winter coats. Deer expand their range to find abundant food sources, and move to areas with lush, green growth. Does prepare to deliver fawns.

### Gardening Tips:

- Protect young vegetation with netting or burlap.
- Start using repellants early to train the deer to stay away.
- Setting out feeders for the returning birds? Make sure they are high enough deer can't reach them – at least 8 feet off the ground.

## Summer (Jun/Jul/Aug)

Deer primarily eat fresh, green vegetation, leaves, tender shoots, fruits, nuts, mushrooms. They forage and browse in early mornings and late evenings to avoid the heat. Bucks grow antlers. Deer prefer dense cover and proximity to water. They prefer thick forests and tall grasses to help to regulate their body temperatures and access varied vegetation. Deer appear in small groups, especially with fawns.

### Gardening Tips:

- If using deer repellent sprays or crystals, make sure to reapply regularly according to instructions. Swap repellents so deer don't become accustomed to one scent.
- Managing water is important. Morning is best for watering plants; evening watering could make the leaves more succulent and attractive for night-grazing deer.
- Eliminate pools of water which could entice thirsty deer. (This will also discourage mosquitos.)



## Autumn (Sep/Oct/Nov)

Bucks with growing antlers become more active, vocalizing, rubbing trees and making scrapes for dominance. Does estrus cycle begins in late autumn, and matriarchal groups temporarily dissolve during mating season. As the leaves fall and woodland food becomes scarcer, deer broaden their search for food and scope out vegetable gardens and flower beds late at night and in the early morning.

### Gardening Tips:

- This is tree planting season. Protect new and young trees from antler damage with tree wrap and/or temporary fencing.
- If planting cold-resistant winter vegetables, use HOA-approved fencing or other deer-repellant options.
- Use repellent sprays, crystals or soap bars to protect bushes and perennials, and reapply vigilantly.
- Going to put out winter bird feeders? Make sure they are high enough deer can't reach them – at least 8 feet off the ground.