

Deer Feeding Habits with Vegetation – A Summer Study

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The purpose of this project was to identify plants that deer will and will not eat. Also studied were two forms of repellents, liquid fence and plantskydo granular. Three gardens were planted on June 5, 2009. Two gardens had the identical plants in them. The middle garden had plants that deer were known not to eat. See the lists below.

Throughout the summer, the gardens were watered (soaked) every other day, weeded and tended to. During really dry (of which there were many) and hot days (of which there were some), the gardens were watered/tended to everyday. The weather over the summer was mostly cool with many days only reaching into the upper 70's. It was not particularly rainy until later in the summer. There was very low humidity.

This author was not responsible for the spraying and spreading of the repellants. Lance has the information on when the gardens were treated. It was evident to this author when it was done from the residue on the plants. The watering was done very carefully as not to wash away the repellents.

It was amazing that the untreated garden was **mostly** untouched until the beginning of August. It was eaten little by little before that time. After that, the garden was eaten at a rather fast rate. Another issue to ponder was that this untreated garden was closest to the stream. Does this make a difference? Was there a deer population boom at this time as well?

It was proven that spraying repellent (liquid fence) and applying granular repellent (plantskydo) works very well. In the unsprayed garden by the end of summer it was eaten almost to the ground and quite a number of the plants were gone completely. The treated garden was never touched. At the end of the summer when the spraying stopped, the garden that was sprayed originally was eaten down within a couple of weeks. This may answer the about question of location. Maybe it does not make a difference.

Of the plants that were classified as "deer are known to eat" they seemed to have little to no interest in the Cleome Sparkler Lavender. Even in the unsprayed garden, that plant was virtually untouched. They also loved to eat the pepper plants but not the vegetable itself. It was also noted that they ate the tomato plant but not the tomatoes themselves. None of the plants in the garden classified as "deer do not eat" were eaten by deer. It appears that rabbits took a few bites but even then just sporadically and on only the Coral Bells and Cosmos plants.

After a heavy rain towards the end of the summer, the treatment seemed to have stopped and the treated garden started to be eaten little by little until it was eaten

down quite a bit by the time the project ended (early September). If you choose to use the spray method to protect your plants, make sure to spray them after every rain shower, and be careful in your watering of the plants so as not to wash the repellent away.

The conclusion is that deer did not eat the plants on the list of that category as well as Sparkler Lavender plants. Rabbits will nibble at some of the plants the deer won't touch but they did not cause extensive damage to them here in these gardens. The repellents will keep the deer away but only as long as the plants are continuously treated.

A question to think about is that this was an unusually cool summer. Would the results have been different had it been hotter!! Another thought is that this area, around the EEC, is full of vegetation for the deer to choose from. In neighborhoods where vegetation may not be as plentiful, the results may be different. This author still concludes that the repellents do work and will keep the deer away if properly used.

Plants Deer are known to eat:

Frances Hasta
Garden David Phlox
Purple Magnees Coneflower
Garden Bright Eyes Phlox
Apricot Sparkle Day Lily
Asiatic Lilus
Cuspidaka Emerald Spreader Yew
Sparkler Lavender Cleome (Did not eat at all)
Old Glory Hasta
Impatiens (seemed to eat the flowers and leave the green stems/leaves)
California Wonder Peppers
Early Girl Tomatoes
Champion Tomatoes

Plants Deer Don't Eat:

Boxwood Green Velvet
Snow White Bee Balm
Baby Sun Coreopsis
Frosty Fire Diarithus
Snow Angel Coralbells (Some bites from Rabbits)
Marigolds
Cosmos (Some bites from Rabbits)
Ageratum
Lantana
Snapdragon
Coleus