Controlling Deer

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service
controlling DEER

Deer populations have increased in many areas to such an extent that serious damage has resulted to forest and agricultural crops. Deer cause damage by browsing on terminal and lateral growth of trees, vertically stripping the bark from tree trunks, polishing or rubbing antlers on small trees, and grazing green succulent agricultural crops.

The Need for Control

In many cases, damage is the direct result of too many deer competing for a limited supply of natural food. Larger harvest of deer during the hunting season would reduce this damage by lowering the number of animals competing for the same food supply. Either-sex hunting is often necessary to reduce the reproductive capacity of a herd and prevents a rapid increase to former numbers. Where a sufficient reduction in population is not possible, or a few animals still cause serious damage, mechanical or chemical methods will be necessary to reduce loss to agriculture.

Repellents

Chemical repellents offer a method for reducing deer damage. There are two general categories, area (odor) repellents and taste repellents.

Area Repellents

Tankage, a by-product of animal packing plants, has, in many cases, proven effective as an all-season area repellent. Application: Place 2 to 3 ounces of tankage in 3 by 5-inch cloth parts bags. Hang bags loosely on the tree requiring protection. Small trees require only one tankage bag, while larger trees may require up to four bags. Caution: Tankage may attract coyotes.

Tankage is available at some local feed dealers. Bags may be ordered from a parts bag supplier.

Taste Repellents

Thiram is an effective taste repellent. It is available in varying forms and concentrations. Apply thiram to plant parts or other objects subject to damage before damage starts. This product may only be applied to fruit trees during the dormant season. Never apply thiram to plant parts that will be eaten by humans or domestic animals. Consult product label for specific mixing and application directions. READ AND FOLLOW ALL LABEL DIRECTIONS.

Fencing

Woven-wire fence - An 8-foot, woven-wire fence will keep deer out of an area under most conditions. Woven-wire fencing is available in 4-foot widths, and can be used to construct an 8-foot fence. Stay wires should not have more than a 6-inch spacing,
top and bottom wires should be at least 9-gauge, with a mesh of 11-gauge wire. Barbed wire may be strung above the woven wire if more height is desired.

**Electric fence** - The electric fence is designed primarily for summer use. Weeds and grass must be suppressed through mowing or herbicides to prevent them from grounding the lower wire. If the fence is used during the winter and the lower wire becomes buried in snow, disconnect the electricity to this wire. Use 1/2-inch wood stock for posts and crossarms and a minimum of 18-gauge steel-core copper wire for fencing. Space posts 30-45 feet apart. About 2,500 feet of wire and 20-28 posts with 49-56 crossarms will be required to fence one acre. NOTE! Deer, like farm animals, must learn about an electric fence; therefore, breaks may be frequent just after installation. Fencing must be inspected regularly and breaks repaired immediately.

**Staking** - To prevent buck rubbing, drive three 2 by 2-inch hardwood stakes about 18 inches apart so tree is equally protected on all sides to height of 3 to 4 feet.

**Staking Diagram**

- [ ] Top View
- [ ] Tree
- [ ] Stake

**Electric Deer Fence**