

Keeping Deer Away From Vegetable Gardens

As urban sprawl spreads, wild animals encroach on the urban areas. Their habitat is taken away so they are left to survive in subdivisions, towns, cities, and ranchettes. Wildlife will eat what they can find in these areas. White-tailed deer are a populous species in Oklahoma and a small vegetable garden can provide a cafeteria of delectable food for deer to eat.

Large pastures of oats, wheat, and rye are also attractive to deer, but they are not easily controlled there. There are steps a vegetable gardener can take to deter deer from the fruits of their labor.

Before these steps are taken, first understand deer habits in order to determine if the animals eating your garden plants are deer. Deer are browsers and are selective about what they eat. They primarily come out early in the morning and late in the evening. They will tear or rip leaves, rather than bite them off like rabbits do. Their footprints look like upside down hearts. Their heaviest feeding times will be in May and June when they have babies and again in the fall when they are breeding. Interesting, this time period is also prime gardening time.

Here are a few steps that can be taken to keep deer out of your vegetable garden:

1. **FENCE:** Fences off the garden space. They are expensive, but also very effective. They can be used for many years. The fence must be at least 8' tall. Wire mesh works the best. Electric fences are the most effective, but at an added cost. The electric shock must run at the top of the fence, about nose-level to the deer and at the bottom to keep the deer from crawling under the fence. A peanut butter fence may be built by adding peanut butter wrapping in foil attached by adhesive tape to the shocked fence. When the deer smell the peanut butter, they will get a small jolt.
2. **FRIGHTEN:** The best time to frighten the deer is at the onset of their entrance to the garden. A loud noise works. Radio devices are now

available to place in the garden to emit high pitched sound. This sound is annoying to deer but silent to humans. Wind chimes can help as well as barking dogs in the yard which frighten them. However, deer are adaptable. If they realize the sounds are not going to hurt them, they will ignore and keep browsing.

3. **REPEL:** When deer realize something does not smell good or taste good, they will leave it alone. Many commercial products are available to repel deer from vegetable gardens. Ortho makes a product called "Deer- B-Gone" which is made from rotten eggs. Another is "Deer Away Big Game Repellent". Homemade repellent recipes can also be found and used.
4. **DETER:** Deer like lettuce, spinach, clover, and other leafy plants. Plant deer their own garden space using these vegetables so they will stay away from your prize garden. Plant garlic and onions around leafy vegetable in your garden to deter deer.
5. **LOCATION:** Plant a garden close to the home and as far away from wooded areas as possible. In the wild, deer live at the forest edge, not in the forest.
6. **WIVES TALES:** Home-made methods may also work. Deer avoid human hair and fragrant bar soap. Hang these around and deer will leave.

Although these methods will help keep deer away from the home vegetable garden, nothing is an absolute. Deer are very adaptable and, remember, killing deer is against the law except in designated hunting areas.

For more information on deer control in vegetable gardens, refer to:

OSU Fact Sheet [E-979](#)

OSU Fact Sheet [L-267](#)

Call the Tulsa MG Hotline at 918-746-3701 to talk to a Master Gardener