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EFFECTIVE DEER FENCES

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If you've tried various forms of sight, sound, taste, and touch repellents for deer, yet still have them feeding on your choice garden plants, perhaps it's time to consider a fence. Just because you have a fence doesn't mean it will be effective at keeping out deer. There are several facts you need to keep in mind when installing such a fence.

Height, or width, is probably the most important factor with deer fences, especially if high deer pressure. White-tailed deer can jump almost eight feet high, so effective upright fences against them should be this high. Deer may be able to jump high, but not both high and over a distance. So a fence may not be as high, perhaps six feet, but slanted outward. The deer will try walking under the fence and meet resistance. Such a slanted fence should be at a 45-degree angle, and may consist of fencing with a few strands of additional wire on top for extra height.

A variation can be used to convert a shorter upright fence. Merely add additional height to posts, and string more fencing or additional strands of wire between them. If the fence is about five feet high, you also may add additions to the posts parallel to the ground and on the outside of the fence. Add strands of wire between these to achieve the same effect as a slanted fence.

If you have a standard fence about four or five feet high, you can add a similar and additional one about four feet away. While not high, with this width deer usually won't like to try and clear both and perhaps get caught between or on them.

Out of sight, out of mind, applies to deer with solid wooden fences, or ones with overlapping slats they can't see through. Such privacy fences are quite effective, as deer can't tell what is on the other side. Even if they can smell what is on the other side, and it's attractive to them, they can't be sure that danger isn't lurking there as well.

One less expensive variation on the high fence is to use a commercial heavy-weight deer netting if the deer pressure is low to moderate. These products are quite popular for home gardens as they are easier to work with than wire mesh, are less expensive, and blend into the landscape. Another inexpensive solution is stringing single strands of monofilament twine (such as deep sea fishing twine) between posts, about six inches apart. If deer pressure is really low, you might even get by with a single strand about two feet off the ground. Deer bump into this, are surprised at something they didn't or can't see, so may flee.

Keep in mind deer can't see well (poor depth perception), so many advocate hanging streamers on the lower strands or netting so deer can see them and don't just try running through. Some recommend not putting such ribbon streamers on the top as this tells the deer the fence height. Some have even suggested adding streamers on extensions above the fence, to make deer think it is even taller and so even harder to jump. Some advocate using white streamers to mimic the white tail signal that deer use to warn of danger.

There are many variations of electric fences. You may begin with a single strand, about 30 inches off the ground. Some make this more visible to deer by using bright flagging tape, or conductive polytape. This also helps people avoid these fences by mistake. Make this single strand even more effective and attractive to deer by smearing peanut butter on aluminum foil. One taste won't kill deer, but it will surely discourage them from returning. Studies have shown, though, that using odor repellents in combination with an electric wire may be more effective than using the peanut butter bait.

Single strands of electric wire may work if low populations, but if more deer pressure you may need to add multiple strands. You may add these in various configurations as for mesh and strand fences, with the electric wires about a foot apart along the post supports. With any electric fence, use them only if children won't have a chance of getting injured. Some residential areas may even prohibit them, so check local ordinances first.

If you have just an isolated tree or few plants to protect, consider building a cage around them. You may drive stakes into the ground, stretching wire mesh or deer netting between them. Or you can make a portable frame of scrap lumber or

PVC pipe, attaching netting to these. If portable, make sure such frames are anchored so deer wont push them over. Make sure such mesh has small openings, or is far enough from the plants, to keep deer from reaching the plants through the mesh.

Rhonda Massingham Hart, in her revised book on *Deerproofing Your Yard and Garden*, gives many more details on deer fences and installing them, plus some additional tips:

- As with other controls, it is best to use them before you have a problem. Train deer first, before they find your plants, or even before you plant.
- Fences must be tight, can't have gaps, and should be checked often. Deer almost always will find the openings.
- With this last point in mind, installing fences over uneven terrain can be difficult, leaving openings large enough for deer.

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