

Q: I have been in my home for over 20 years, and for the first time I have families of deer in my front yard, eating my roses and shrubs. They are eating the leaves and buds off of everything. What can I do to get rid of them?

A: The deer have moved into our irrigated, lush gardens as the hills are bone-dry with meager food supplies. Deer are generalist herbivores, which means if it is green they can and probably will eat it. They are also creatures of habit, and once they have identified your garden as a good place to stop for a quick bite, it can be difficult to get them to change their minds. To deer, roses are the equivalent of chocolate truffles; they will jump fences and brave large dogs for a tasty florabunda. Unfortunately deer quickly adapt to many of the repellent materials on the market. Here are a few deer-proofing tips:

Exclusion: If possible, fence your yard. The fence needs to be 76" high. Deer can jump higher than that, but only when being chased. Some people report success with lower fences, but it seems to depend on the deer and what you are trying to protect. Fencing at the appropriate height is often not an option in front yards.

Repellents: There are a number of chemical repellents on the market, although they are relatively expensive and do not last long. They make the plants taste or smell bad to the deer. Check the label to find out what kind of plants they can be used safely on, as some repellants can damage foliage. If deer are hungry, repellents are not very effective. Rain, sprinkler irrigation or heavy dew will wash repellents off. The same holds true for the plethora of 'home remedies', from human hair to Mountain Lion urine; efficacy is short-lived and deer adapt.

There are a number of products on the market that shine lights, spray water or make loud noises when deer enter your yard. Neighbors tend not to think highly of these products, but some people do report limited success.

If fencing is impractical, you may want to consider re-landscaping and replacing the plants the deer are so fond of with others less palatable. The Sunset Western Garden Book has an excellent list of deer resistant plants, but a note of caution—deer can and will eat almost everything. Cornell University has a list of deer tolerant plants available at <http://www.extension.org/>.