

Recommendations for Protecting Plants from Deer Browsing

Early spring: To protect emerging bulbs and spring ephemerals, apply Milorganite, at ½ the recommended rate for turf directly to garden beds. Alternatively, a couple of applications of liquid foliar fertilizers/repellents, like Bobbex or Coast of Maine's Fermented Salmon Food work equally well. I make a second (and final) application of Milorganite, again at ½ rate, about a month later. (Do not fertilize these areas with your "regular" plant food as Milorganite is a fertilizer.) This technique not only feeds your plants at an optimum time, it also protects them. Some gardeners prefer making sachets of Milorganite placing them above ground level hanging them directly from branches or tied to stakes and placed as a perimeter barrier. This method reduces the tendency of the fertilizer to develop mold when applied directly to the ground.

Late spring/ summer: Once full leaf expansion and growth has occurred I switch to alternating a few different brands of spray repellents. I am pleased with Deer Solution, a systemic repellent derived from herbs. I can typically get about 10 days to 2 week's worth of protection from this product. Be aware that flower scapes or buds do not take up any product systemically, so be sure to spritz a different type of repellent when flower buds appear and begin to open. I recommend any of the egg-based products, such as Deer-Off. Deer-Stopper, which contains mint oil, rosemary, and salt, also has proven effective. It is important to "throw them a curve" by alternating products so they don't become too used to one. One home concoction which has proven very effective (and cheap!) is mixing 1 egg with ½ cup of whole milk, adding 1 tbl. cooking oil and 1tbl. dish washing soap (I like the lemon-scented products) to a gallon of water and spraying vulnerable plants about every 10 days. For added effectiveness add a tablespoon of "hot" sauce and a couple drops of oil of rosemary. Finally, I like to give my plants monthly foliar sprays of the aforementioned fertilizers/repellents which afford additional protection.

Late summer/fall: As the growing season winds down, I continue the above spray program, with the exception of any foliar fertilizers, and develop a plan for dormant season protection for susceptible perennials and woody plants. By the beginning of November I will decide if I will continue to rely on repellents or protect vulnerable plants with physical barriers.

Winter: In my opinion, two of the best commercially available repellants available for the homeowner for dormant season protection are the blood-derived repellent, Plantskydd and products containing the fungicide thiram (Deer Pro, Bonide Rabbit-Deer Repellent, Nott's chew-Not, and Gustafson 42-S). I've found that the number of subsequent reapplications is far less with these products than with other popular deer repellents. This is important as environmental conditions (principally temperature) are usually not conducive for the recommended monthly applications with most spray-on repellents.

Brad Roeller