

WHAT DEER OVERPOPULATION?

By Russ Bruner, President Holly Gardeners

On July 14, late night to early morning, a deer population survey was taken on the Ranch by members of the Wildlife Work Group under the direction of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department wildlife biologist, Trevor Tanner. By extrapolating the results of the deer spotted, we can arrive at a pretty good estimate of how many deer are on the Ranch. A healthy deer population is said to be one deer per 10-15 acres.

Let's assume, for the purpose of this discussion, that there is NOT an overpopulation of deer here on the Ranch. Of course, we all know that there has been a significant increase in the deer, particularly in the last two years. But, let's say that we are nowhere near the critical point. We know that damage to our plantings is almost out of control, so what do we do?

Once we accept that fact that we are co-inhabitants with a large deer herd, we need to adjust our defensive measures. One way to do that is with fencing. You might say to me, "We have rules about fences on the Ranch. You can't put up a fence without a permit from the ACC (Architectural Control Committee)." Original subdivision restrictions stated: "No fence shall be erected without the approval in writing of the (ACC) committee." However, the ACC as recently as March 31, 2009 updated the fencing rules. Under these new rules, a property owner has a great deal of latitude to the point of almost being exempt when it comes to garden fencing to protect from deer.

Keep in mind that what we plant in our gardens from the nursery is deer dessert. They love nursery plants especially the new growth. Example: roses.

Dupont and others market garden vinyl netting in rolls 100 feet long. The net can be stretched to seven feet wide. This product offers a lot of possibilities for surrounding or covering a single plant or a number of plants. This type of fencing is lightweight, durable and easy to install. Mesh size is 1/4 inch to one inch. The cost is reasonable considering value to the gardener.

Less expensive garden fencing material is poultry wire and hardware cloth. More expensive is welded wire fencing - five feet by 100 feet rolls, and general purpose field fencing in up to 330 foot lengths. The heavier metal fencing can be used around a single plant or used to enclose a small area into which a deer will most likely not jump into.

Another use for these products is for diversionary fences. A diversionary fence is usually relatively short and temporary and is used to change a deer's usual path away from its usual feeding area- your garden. There is an abundance of fencing products out there. Use your ingenuity to make them effective as deer foils.

The fencing products mentioned can be found at Wal Mart, Home Depot, Lowe's, Atwoods, and Tractor Supply, which calls itself "America's Largest Ag Fencing Retailer." Prices vary.

If fencing gives a "too cluttered" effect for you, there is a less expensive yet equally effective way to repel deer. It is with scent. Liquid Fence stops deer (and rabbits) with an egg, garlic formulation that is advertised to last a month. A long-time favorite, Liquid Fence is hand-sprayed on flowers and shrubs- even Hostas, the ice cream of deer desserts. Liquid Fence is available from Gardener's Supply (1 800 427 3363) for \$15.95 plus S&H. Winter's Nursery has Liquid Fence for about \$15 plus a short drive. Gardener's Supply has a more expensive product called Deer Fortress which is odorless and nontoxic to humans. It should last up to four months.

Www.Spray-N-Grow.com will put you to a garden product web site that features an Animal Deterrents section. In this section find Shake-Away Deer. No mixing or spraying is required- just shake away into your garden. Deer are fooled into believing a coyote has recently passed through. It is also effective for beaver and armadillos. This one lasts a long time too. The cost is

\$16.95 plus S&H.

Closer to home, Aunt Cindi's organic garden on highway 49 going to Pine Mills sells some scent products. One is Fox Urine (\$13.95) by Leg Up Enterprises. With this real fox urine, we can deceive the deer into thinking a fox has marked a boundary around our garden. Simply apply some "fox" onto a cotton ball. Place the cotton ball into a 35mm film canister with holes punched into it. Hang these canisters every 10 to 12 feet around the intended perimeter. Finally, we are communicating to the deer on their own primal communication system. "STAY OUT."

Are we playing mind games with our co-inhabitants or what? Stay tuned, Bob Linker.