

Critter-Proofing the Garden
Southbury Garden Club
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I. In General

- A. Critter-proofing must be **consistent**
- B. Critters are very adaptable (ever try to squirrel-proof a bird feeder?) Try different, or a combination of methods
- C. Remember that critters do have good purposes in the garden as well as bad
 - 1. Skunks and moles eat grubs
 - 2. Skunks will root out and eat subterranean hornets nests
 - 3. Chipmunks eat beetles, slugs and cutworms
 - 4. Birds eat mosquitoes, beetles, slugs, moths—almost every kind of insect—and the Northern Flicker dines exclusively on ants!

II. Critter-Proofing Methods (from least to most effective)

A. Trapping

- 1. This is the least practical for most of us
- 2. Many of us don't actually have the heart to kill critters
- 3. Many of us cannot or will not transport the critters we catch in the "Hav-a-heart" traps—and even they occasionally cause animal death
- 4. Even mousetraps don't always kill cleanly
 - a. If you want to use a mouse trap, bait it without setting it for a few nights before actually setting it—you'll increase the likelihood of actually catching the critters

B. Scaring

- 1. Most animals, especially suburban ones, habituate to the usual scare tactics
 - a. Scarecrows
 - b. Mylar strips or balloons
 - c. Fake predator decoys like snakes, owls or herons
- (i) Decoys should be relocated every 3 days for maximum effect
- 2. Water cannons, or motion activated water devices
 - a. crafty critters learn the limits of the range quite quickly
 - b. Your own pets, relatives, or even you, can also set them off
- 3. Dogs and cats
 - a. Perhaps most effective in a fenced yard
 - b. A dog that is tied is similar to a water cannon—crafty critters learn the limits of the dog run quite quickly

C. Resistant Plants

- 1. Limited success depending on the following factors:
 - a. Plants chosen—daffodils are poisonous so nothing eats them

- b. Availability of choice plants in neighboring yards
- 2. You can increase your success by planting truly resistant plants in multiple places in the yard
 - a. Plant poisonous or repellent bulbs in numerous planting beds or groups (i) Bulbs to try include allium, anemone, chionodoxa, (glory of the snow) eranthus,(winter aconite), frittilaria, galanthus (snowdrops), and scilla Just because a bulb is poisonous, it does not insure the critters will leave it be. Squirrels and chipmunks regularly "naturalize" my crocus and grape hyacinths
- 3. Choose plants on "deer resistant" lists—but remember, a starving critter will eat almost anything. I've given you a list of "deer resistant" links on the Internet at the end of the handout

D. Repellants

Next to fencing, this is the most effective control

- 2. Smell based are better than taste repellents because they warn the deer away before they've had a chance to bite or chew
- 3. Pay attention to dosing requirements—the most common failure of topical repellents is the failure to apply it properly or often enough
- 4. Repellents usually contain one or a combination of the following ingredients:
 - a. dried blood
 - b. garlic
 - c- rotten eggs
 - d. hot pepper
 - e. fermented salmon or other fish oil
 - f. soap (Hinder")
 - g. spices (clove, thyme or mint)
- 5. No repellent is cleared for use on food crops except Deer Off Solution which is registered as food grade, and Hinder"
- 6. Predator urines (liquid or powdered) are also a type of repellent but they may attract fox or coyote that happen to be in the vicinity.
- 7. Vole-Bloc-
 - a. A soil additive
 - b. Must be tilled into the garden at a depth of 6"
 - c. A "moat" can also be constructed around sensitive or valuable plants—it must be 1" deep and 4-6" wide

E. Fencing

- 1. Almost 100% effective
- 2. Some issues exist with this as well. A deer fence must be 8' high—local zoning doesn't usually permit this
- 3. Fencing for moles, voles, rabbits and woodchucks must be buried as deep as 2' in the ground.

F. A Word About Poisons

I have heard too many stories—and know animal behavior too well—to ever be able to recommend poisons. Even bait, carefully placed in bait stations, can be taken by chipmunks or squirrels and carried off to the neighbor's yard where children or pets play!

An article in The Connecticut Gardener recommends blocks of rat poison inserted in lengths of PVC pipe as vole bait. It is allegedly held in place by a

sticky wax. I cannot recommend this. Can we really believe that a vole, chipmunk or squirrel will be defeated by a bit of sticky wax?

When it comes to critter-proofing of any type, the safest motto to adopt is "first do no harm." As we all know, actions have unintended consequences.

G. Common Critters and Primary Control Methods

(from least to most intensive)

Birds - Mylar Strips or Balloons, old CDs, noise cannon

Chipmunks - Dried Blood, Fermented Salmon, Predator Urine or a dog or cat

Deer - Fencing, repellents, resistant plants, dogs

Moles - Mole-Med, vibrations, smoke away, dog

Opossums - buried fencing, trapping

Rabbits - Dried Blood, fermented salmon, hot pepper sprays, (but not hot pepper wax), black pepper, dog

Squirrels - dried blood, predator urine, dog or cat

Voiles - Mole-Med, barriers, dog or cat

Woodchucks - buried fencing, smoke-away in active tunnels, trapping

Internet Resources for Deer Resistant Plant Lists & Ideas

www.naturework.com

(Click on "Informational Handouts" on bottom left. There are 2 on deer) [Also lots of wonderful organic info]

www.hort.uconn.edu/ipm/homecirnd/htms/11deer.htm [deer]

<http://www.hort.uconn.edu/ipm/>[integrated pest management in general]

<http://www.connciardener.com>

Once there, click on "Animals in the Garden" for articles on

limiting deer browse damage, a recipe for a deer and vole repellent and an article on voles

[www.ecostudies.orq/lma deer resistance strategies.html](http://www.ecostudies.orq/lma%20deer%20resistance%20strategies.html)

[www.ecostudies.orq/lma deer resistant woodies.html](http://www.ecostudies.orq/lma%20deer%20resistant%20woodies.html)

www.gardeners.com --the web site for Gardener's Supply Company, which has a bunch of great organic critter repellents. Once there, for general information, click on the "Learning" tab at the top of the page

www.qardeninq.cornell.edu/factsheets/deerdef/index.html--Cornell University Cooperative Extension. Great links to lots of other resources.