Controlling Deer Damage in Georgia

GEORGIA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
WILDLIFE RESOURCES DIVISION

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INTRODUCTION

In the 19th century, white-tailed deer were nearly extirpated in Georgia, but through diligent wildlife management efforts, deer were successfully restored throughout the state. In fact, current deer densities in some localized areas may inflict significant damage to forestry, agricultural or horticultural crops. However, deer are a valuable natural, recreational, and economic resource and control of deer damage needs careful consideration. In 2022, economic value derived from hunter purchases such as license fees, sporting equipment sales, food and land leases, and trip costs totaled more than $2.6 billion (2022 USFWS National Survey) in Georgia alone. Although minor on a statewide basis, deer damage may be severe on a local level and very important to an affected individual.

The first step in controlling deer damage is making sure that deer, rather than another animal, are causing damage. Plant shoots or twigs browsed by deer have a crushed, torn appearance, while those eaten by rabbits are cleanly snipped at a sharp angle. This is because deer have no top front teeth and must pull and tear vegetation. Deer are the only native animals that routinely browse plants 4 to 5 feet above the ground. Fertilized and cultivated plants are often more attractive to deer than surrounding natural vegetation, especially in late winter and early spring. In high deer populations, more competition for natural foods increases this attraction.

Landowners should determine the extent of the damage and estimate the monetary impact of the deer browsing. Not all deer browsing causes economic loss. The amount of time and money invested in damage control should be in proportion to the actual cost of the damage. This brochure explains methods of deer damage control. One or more of these methods can help mitigate problems caused by deer.

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HARVEST

One of the most effective ways to reduce deer damage to crops is to reduce the number of deer. This can be accomplished by allowing gun or bow hunting on your land during the legal

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hunting season. Providing hunting access not only reduces deer pressure on crops but also provides a source of food and recreation for hunters. Deer can reach high populations quickly where agricultural crops are adjacent to good cover, therefore the continuation of hunting year after year is necessary to maintain acceptable stable deer populations.

Revenues from hunting leases can be used to recover losses from damage or pay land taxes. With open hunting land at a premium, leasing your land to hunters can be profitable. The key to controlling deer numbers is harvesting deer causing conflict, especially does. The landowner can require hunters to shoot antlerless deer on legal doe days. Landowners also could consider requiring hunters to harvest a doe prior to harvesting a buck. Biologists with the DNR Game Management Section or agents of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service can assist landowners in developing deer harvest plans and hunting lease agreements.

SPECIAL CROP DAMAGE PERMITS

Under most circumstances, deer harvest during legal hunting seasons should adequately manage deer populations. However, in some instances special permits may be issued to commercial farmers to allow removal of conflict deer outside of the open hunting season. These permits are typically only be issued to growers having a 3-acre minimum of commercial crops, permits are not issued for personal gardens. Crop damage permits and permit renewals to remove a specific number and type of deer are obtained through an application process at https://www.gooutdoorsgeorgia.com/. A field assessment of damage may be required for new permits.

First-time Applications

- First-time applicants must record field locations, provide the total number of acres under cultivation, list the affected crops, and provide a description of the damage.
- Once a permit is approved, the farmer must provide a copy of the permit to each person they intend assist with deer control and instruct the person to register as an assistant at https://www.gooutdoorsgeorgia.com/.
- Farmers are no longer required to provide assistant names and identification when applying for a Deer Crop Damage Permit, they may use anyone having a valid Assistant Registration for Deer Crop Damage.

Assistants

- Anyone assisting a farmer with deer control under a permit must complete an Assistant Registration for Deer Crop Damage annually. You must have a copy of the permit and enter the permit number when completing the registration.
- Assistant Registrations must be renewed annually, but do not authorize deer harvest without a valid Deer Crop Damage Permit from a farmer.

Permit Renewals

- After the First-time Field Registration and Application, farmers may renew permits in subsequent years by applying for a Deer Crop Damage Permit at https://www.gooutdoorsgeorgia.com/ .

- Farmers may also renew permits in the same growing season if damage continues after killing the permitted number of deer by applying for a Deer Crop Damage Permit at https://www.gooutdoorsgeorgia.com/ .
- Fields may be added, edited, or removed at any time in your account by selecting the Field Registration under Application History.

FENCING

In some cases, significantly reducing deer populations may not be practical, and even low numbers of deer sometimes cause problems with cultivated plants. The most reliable way to prevent deer damage over the long term is to fence deer out with either a conventional deer proof fence or an electric fence. Preferably, fences should be constructed prior to depredation by deer. An ideal deer proof fence should be at least 8 feet high. Tying black and white fabric or contrasting mylar strips onto the fencing material helps deer perceive the barrier better. Building and maintaining a deer proof fence can be expensive and labor intensive, but a well-constructed fence will last for many years. Several factors should be considered when choosing a fence including fence design and costs, deer density, crop or landscape value, and aesthetics.

Shorter fences (regardless of material) may be appropriate in certain situations and can be constructed out of less expensive supplies, but effectiveness may be compromised. Fences can be constructed on a slant to increase the width of the fence. The slant will increase effectiveness but is more complicated to construct and requires additional vegetative control. With any fence design, maintenance is crucial. Information on fence designs is available at many agricultural supply and hardware stores or UGA County Extension Service office.

Metal woven wire fencing

This type of fencing consists of heavy-gauge metal wires that intersect to form rectangles. This type of fence is more expensive and labor intensive to construct; it requires sinking of metal stakes (or stronger wood posts) into the ground, and then attaching the wire to each post. However, this fencing is quite durable when posts are properly anchored in the ground. Metal woven wire fencing is the single most effective fencing option there is. Unless you are familiar with fence construction or fencing a very small area (<.5 acres) it is recommended you consult with or hire a fencing contractor to ensure proper installation and that your investment is effective and durable. Metal wire deer fencing coated in polyethylene is another option and is more weather resistant than plain wire. A steel fence and fence parts can last over 20 years.

Polypropylene fencing

Polypropylene mesh is a type of plastic fencing that is attached to vertical posts (similar to metal woven wire). Benefits of this type of fencing are that it will not rust or rot, resists chemicals and acids, and does not have sharp edges. Some products are reinforced at the bottom so that they can be staked down to avoid deer pushing under the fence. However, if the mesh is not strong enough, deer can run through the fence. If using polypropylene mesh, select a grade that has a

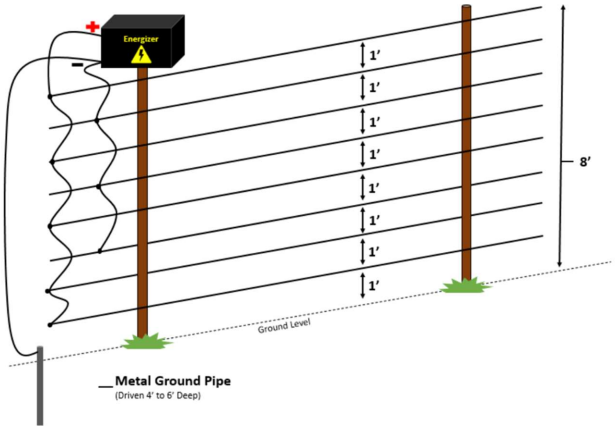
breaking load of at least 800 pounds. This option tends to be the most affordable but can stretch or sag over time.

An 8 foot high polypropylene fence around a corn field. Flagging helps make the fence more visible to deer.

Electric fencing

Electric fences should be constructed of highly visible polytape wire and quality fencing components. Polytape fences are portable, have a life expectancy of more than 15 years. Vegetation should be cleared for 3 to 4 feet around the edge of the wire with herbicides or weed eater. This cleared strip will encourage deer to come in contact with the fence instead of jumping the vegetation and fence. For best results, a New Zealand style charger delivering a minimum of 5,000 volts should be used to power the fence. They provide high voltage for good shocking power and low impedance that helps avoid shorting out by vegetation or ground contact.

Several fence designs are available using from 1 to 5 or more strands of charged wire. Higher deer populations typically require more charged wires because deer are more persistent and difficult to deter. When setting up your fence, the bottom wire should be no more than 10 –12 inches from the ground with the remaining wires 12 inches apart. If the bottom wire is more than 12 inches high, deer can crawl underneath. Posts should be widely spaced (30 feet) to avoid the appearance of a fence. This will encourage deer to walk up to the fence and be shocked rather than jumping over it. With pressure-treated pine posts, this type of fence can last for 35-40 years, making it a low cost, low maintenance device.



This design prevents deer from going under, through, or jumping over the fence.

The Peanut Butter Fence, a single or multiple strand electric fence using high visibility polytape with peanut butter smeared on it, may be used on a temporary basis for low-density deer populations. The single polytape wire should be 34 inches above the ground and attached to stakes or posts spaced about 25 feet apart. The bait, spread directly on the fence or dabbed on aluminum tags attached to the fence, lures deer to touch the wire with their noses or tongues and receive a memorable shock. Bait should be applied as needed but at least every 3 to 4 weeks.

Perceived high cost is the major objection of many farmers and gardeners to electric fences. However, simple designs like single strand fences are often inexpensive and effective in controlling deer damage. A more effective three-strand fence costs only a few cents more per foot. Designs using electroplastic wire and high output chargers are also affordable. An investment in an electric fence should last many years resulting in relatively low cost per acre per year.

AUDIBLE SCARE TACTICS/PYROTECHNICS

Scare devices can be effective in keeping deer away from both small and large cultivated areas. These devices often produce only short-term results but may be more effective when combined with other damage control techniques.

Scare Pistols

In places where deer are visible during daylight hours and have lost their fear of humans, scare pistols may be an integral part of a deer repellent strategy. When purchasing pyrotechnic pistols, be sure to order a pistol (launcher), blanks and cartridges. When choosing ammunition (cartridges), select for a mix of "bangers," "screamers" and "whistlers" to keep deer from getting used to any one sound.

Gas Cannons

Gas exploders or cannons are the most effective devices for large areas. Exploders can be set to explode at regular intervals. Both timing of explosions and location of cannon should be changed frequently to keep deer from getting acclimated to the noise. Scare pistols and pyrotechnical gas cannons may be purchased online.

VISUAL SCARE TACTICS

Visual scare devices may be the quick fix for deer depredation problems. However, deer quickly may become accustomed to visual scare tactics and resume conflict behavior. These devices may be more effective when combined with other damage control techniques. Methods should be varied every 2 to 3 days so that deer do not become accustomed to one type of tactic. Shiny objects generally include balloons, plastic milk bottles, aluminum pie tins, colored flags or streamers. Scary eyes are round, colorful, or reflective objects painted with large eyes. The continuous movement and bright colors of shiny, mylar balloons filled with helium may help repel deer. Balloons can be attached to stakes, fences or branches so they float freely 4-6 feet above the ground. When the helium dissipates, the limp Mylar balloon can be attached so it hangs down and flaps in the breeze.

Shiny objects such as mylar balloons and aluminum pie tins may help repel deer.

COMMERCIAL REPELLENTS

There are generally two categories of commercial repellents: odor and taste. Factors to consider when choosing a repellent include: if it is appropriate for edible plants, how easily it "sticks" to the plant, durability (how long it stays on the plant), and expense. Repellents are more effective when applied before browsing begins and effectiveness of almost all repellents can be increased by use of a commercial sticker/spreader. Effectiveness will vary depending on weather conditions, amount of deer pressure, type of plants to be protected, and persistence and ingenuity of the applicator. When selecting a repellent, determine its ingredients-both active and inert. Several tests of repellents show that those emitting a sulfurous odor (e.g. predator urine, meat proteins, garlic, eggs) were most effective in repelling deer, particularly during the summertime.

Odor-based repellents that use garlic or egg-based are quite safe for edible plants and do not impact the fruit. Taste repellents (typically containing bittering agents) not only make the plant taste bad to deer but may make produce taste bad to people. Some taste repellents are systematic in function, meaning the repellent is absorbed by the roots and spread throughout the plant thereby lasting 2-3 years with one application. Additionally, be sure to determine how often the repellent should be applied and if repeat applications are necessary following a rain or watering event. Repellents in granular forms may be more desirable from an application standpoint.

Lastly, determining the cost of the amount of repellent necessary to temporarily protect your plants is strong consideration for most. Remember, variety is important when it comes to repelling deer by not letting them become accustomed to any one smell or condition. A combination of repellents and scare tactics is usually the most reliable, temporary deterrent to deer browsing. However, hunting and electric fencing have proven to be the most cost-effective deer protection in the long-term. Many varieties of commercial repellents may be purchased locally at farm supply stores.

CONCLUSION

White-tailed deer are a valuable natural resource in Georgia. Although these animals sometimes cause damage to agricultural and horticultural operations, deer also provide substantial economic benefits and recreational opportunities for people throughout the state. Through wise management and careful use of control methods, Georgia can continue to have a healthy deer population, profitable agricultural and horticultural operations, and productive gardens. Many control methods are available for both small and large landowners requiring various investments of time and money. Managing deer damage must involve careful assessment of the problem, selection of the most suitable method of population control, exclusion or deterrence, and persistence in following through with the best technique or combination of techniques.

LINKS

UGA Extension List of Deer-Tolerant Plants

UGA Extension- Fencing

USDA- Comparison of Commercial Deer Repellents

USDA- Fencing for Wildlife *See pages 7-9

DNR Game Management Section- Contact Us

Go Outdoors Georgia (Licenses and Permits)

STATEWIDE OFFICE LOCATIONS

Game Management

Region 1

706-295-6041

2650 Floyd Springs Road
Armuchee, GA 30105

Region 2

770-535-5700

2150 Dawsonville Highway
Gainesville, GA 30501

Region 3

706-595-4222

4176 West Bypass Road
Thomson, GA 30824

Region 4

229-426-5267

1773-A Bowens Mill Highway
Fitzgerald, GA 31750

Region 5

229-430-4254

2024 Newton Road
Albany, GA 31701

Region 6

912-262-3173

1 Conservation Way
Brunswick, GA 31520