Controlling Deer Damage in Georgia

Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife Resources Division
Game Management Section

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State of Georgia

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DNR Publication
State of Georgia
Developed - December 2001
Revised - June 2008

Preface

This booklet is intended to provide advice to all types of individuals experiencing deer damage problems. The Wildlife Resources Division hopes this booklet will serve as a quality source of information for handling deer damage problems. If you need additional assistance with deer damage or any other wildlife related problems, feel free to contact your local Wildlife Resource Division office.

Game Management Offices

Region I	Armuchee	(706) 295-6041
Region II	Gainesville	(770) 535-5700
Region III	Thomson	(706) 595-4222
Region III	Thomson (Augusta)	(706) 667-4672
Region IV	Fort Valley	(478) 825-6354
Region V	Albany	(229) 430-4254
Region VI	Fitzgerald	(229) 426-5267
Region VII	Brunswick	(912) 262-3173
	Headquarters	(770) 918-6416

Acknowledgements

We express our sincere appreciation to the 2001 deer committee members for their valuable assistance reviewing and editing this booklet. Deer committee members (2001) included: Haven Barnhill, John Bowers, Bill Cooper, Jim Ezell, Dan Forster, Ken Grahl, Scott McDonald, Nick Nicholson, Mike VanBrackle, and Greg Waters. We also thank Melissa Cummings, Wildlife Resources Division Public Affairs Office, for layout and printing assistance. Additionally, we would like to thank Jeff Jackson and Gary Wade for their assistance in producing the deer tolerant plant list.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

White-tailed deer were once nearly eliminated in the state of 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, home gardens, and shrubbery. However, deer are a valuable natural, recreational, and economic resource and because of their substantial value, control of deer damage needs careful consideration. Economic value derived from license fees, sporting equipment sales, food and land leases totaled more than $656 million per year (2006 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 farmer or homeowner. This brochure is intended to assist landowners experiencing deer damage problems.

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 should be effective in solving most problems caused by deer.

Fertilized and cultivated plants are often more attractive to deer than surrounding natual vegetation, especially in late winter and early spring.

DEER TOLERANT PLANTS

Planting ornamental plants that are a low preference to deer is one solution to deer browsing. Please remember that very few plants, if any, are totally deer resistant. When deer populations are high and food is scarce, hungry deer are more likely to feed on low preference and otherwise unpalatable ornamental plants. Deer prefer tender new foliage on young plants and fertilized ornamentals. During dry conditions, deer may be attracted to irrigated plants. **Appendix 1** will be helpful when selecting deer tolerant ornamental plants for your landscape.

FEEDING WILDLIFE

Many people enjoy feeding wildlife, especially deer. However, artificial wildlife feed may contribute to unnaturally high deer populations. Supplemental feed can increase deer reproductive rates, promote locally high deer densities, and may result in deer that are less fearful of humans typically resulting in increased deer damage problems. Additionally, sometimes people think that by feeding deer it will deter them from eating out of gardens or landscaped areas. However, this will only result in the deer eating the provided "feed" and any additional available food, such as gardens or landscaped areas.

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 liberal legal hunting seasons for no charge or with a paid lease agreement. Providing hunting access not only reduces deer pressure on crops but also provides a source of food and recreation for hunters. Deer can build up 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 and leases ranging from $2 to $36 per acre, leasing your land to hunters can be profitable. Some organized bow hunting groups specialize in urban/suburban deer harvest in a conscientious and discrete manner. These groups often donate harvested game to selected food pantries and shelters. Contact any Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Wildlife Resources Division Game Management office for information on bow hunting groups for your area.

The key to controlling deer numbers is harvesting existing nuisance deer, 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) 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

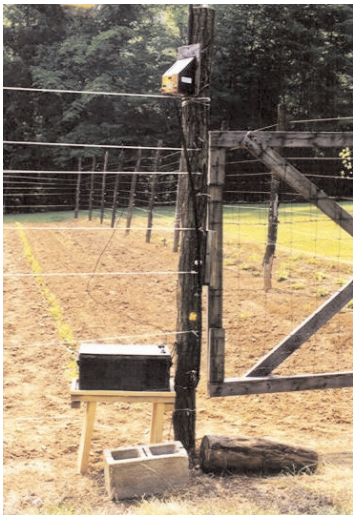
Under most circumstances, deer harvest during legal hunting seasons should adequately reduce deer populations. However, in some instances special permits may be issued to commercial farmers to allow removal of nuisance antlerless deer outside of the open hunting season. These permits can only be issued to growers having a 3-acre minimum of commercial crops. Crop damage permits to remove a specific number of antlerless deer are obtained from the DNR Game Management Section (see page 1). A field assessment of damage by wildlife biologists or technicians may be required.

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. Ideally, fences should be constructed prior to nuisance deer problems. This may minimize any established feeding behavior.

An ideal deer proof fence should be constructed of woven wire at least 8 feet high. Building and maintaining a deer proof fence can be expensive ($6 to $10 per foot) and labor intensive, but a well-constructed fence will last for many years. Shorter fences may be appropriate in certain situations and can be constructed out of less expensive materials but effectiveness may be compromised. Temporary fencing material may work well in certain situations. Several factors should be considered when choosing a fence including fence design and costs, deer density, crop or landscape value, and aesthetics. Plans for fence designs are available at Game Management offices statewide.

A more economical method of excluding deer may be with an electric fence. Electric fences should be constructed of highly visible polytape wire and quality fencing components. Tying or stapling together broken polytape strands will easily repair damaged fences. 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. Chargers are available for AC (household current), DC battery (6-volt, 9-volt, or 12-volt), or solar power. 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 hungrier and more difficult to deter.

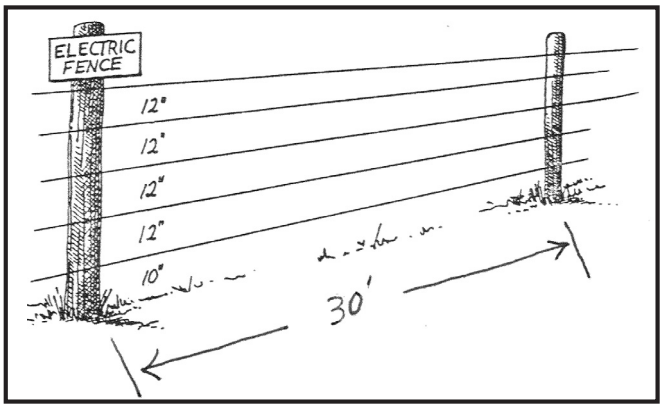


Example of an electric fence setup

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. In some cases, a single strand fence has proven effective for several years. The fence should be checked daily for breaks in the wire until deer learn to avoid it. 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. A variation of this fence substitutes Hinder or Deer Away repellent for peanut butter, and in recent studies is shown to be effective at repelling deer. Polytape fences are portable, have a life expectancy of more than 15 years and can be installed for $0.10 to $0.25 per foot.

Deer receive a memorable shock when lured to the Peanut Butter Fence

The Pennsylvania Five Wire fence has proven effective even in areas with high deer populations. The bottom wire should be no more than 10 inches from the ground with the remaining wires 12 inches apart. If the bottom wire is more than 10 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. Installation and material costs range from $0.50 to $2 per foot. 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.



The Pennsylvania Five Wire Fence has proven effective even in areas with high deer populations.

Perceived high cost is the major objection of many farmers and gardeners to electric fences. However, simple designs are often inexpensive and effective in controlling deer damage. Designs using electroplastic wire and high output chargers are also affordable. A single strand fence can cost only 15 cents per linear foot for materials. A more effective three-strand fence costs only a few cents more per foot. For example, a 500 X 500-foot field containing almost 6 acres could be fenced with a single strand of electroplastic, high visibility wire for about $300, or with a three-strand fence for about $400. This investment would last many years and should give good control of deer damage. Assuming a 10-year life expectancy, even a three-strand fence would cost only $40 per year or about $7 per acre. Such a fence certainly would be cost effective for control of browsing on high value crops such as orchards, vegetables, or ornamental shrubbery.

Deer often are attracted to freshly plowed fields. Electric fences erected after plowing but before planting may condition deer to avoid fields before they begin browsing on new growth. With any electric fence design, maintenance is crucial. Vegetation should be cleared for 3 to 4 feet around the edge of the wire with herbicides or weedeater. This cleared strip will encourage deer to come in contact with the fence instead of jumping the vegetation and fence. If batteries are used, they should be replaced often to maintain full power. Information on electric fencing components and designs is available at many agricultural supply and hardware stores as well as from your local DNR Game Management or County Extension Office.

TREE WRAPS OR TUBES

Wrapping trees or placing tubes or tree shelters around the trunk of the tree will effectively reduce browsing. This protection also reduces antler-rubbing damage which typically occurs in the fall as bucks are entering the breeding season and marking their territory. Effective tree wraps or shelters range from commercially-available plastic wraps to home remedies such as burlap, a cylinder of wire, or 4-6 inch diameter plastic drain tile. This type of exclusion is particularly important for protecting high-value individual plants such as nursery, orchard or landscape trees. Remember, it is very important to protect the terminal bud; so building a 5-foot tall cylinder around a 2-foot tall seedling makes good sense.

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. Scare pistols can be purchased from various suppliers. 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. These items can be purchased online or contact the local WRD Game Management office for suggested retailers.

Gas Cannons

Gas exploders or cannons are the most effective devices for large areas and can be used on small acreages. Exploders can be purchased for about $250 and 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. Pyrotechnical gas cannons may be purchased online or contact the local WRD Game Management office for suggested retailers.

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 nuisance 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/Scary Eyes

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. Effectiveness really varies but can be short-lived unless repeated changes are made. 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. Moving the balloons every 2-3 days and using them in conjunction with other techniques will add longevity to effectiveness.

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

Scarecrows/Human Scent

Scarecrows accompanied by a portable radio may temporarily frighten deer in small areas such as home gardens. Moving the scarecrow and radio every few days may increase effectiveness. Placing recently worn articles with fresh human scent such as baseball caps, socks or T-shirts also will increase effectiveness. Again, deer may become acclimated to the situation and resume depredation.

Yard Lights/Sprinklers/Water Spray Repellent

Motion activated yard lights, common to both farm yards and suburban areas, will startle deer and may discourage them from using the lighted area. However, deer may still remain in the shadows and eventually become accustomed to the light. Flashing lights or strobe light systems seem to work better than continuous light sources. Depending on location, lights can be powered by household electricity, 12-volt battery or solar power. Motion activated sprinklers attached to your garden hose also can be effective deterrents for deer on lawns or gardens. Several systems are commercially available including a reasonably priced battery operated system.

REPELLENTS

Repellents are the most commonly used method of preventing unwanted deer browsing on small acreages. Both home remedies and commercial repellents have been used with varying degrees of success. There are two general types of repellents: 1) area repellents that produce a noxious odor and 2) contact repellents that are offensive-tasting to deer. Both types of repellents are more effective if applied before deer browsing begins. It is much easier to discourage deer from feeding on certain plants than to interrupt established feeding patterns. A variety of repellents are available for discouraging deer, but most are effective only on small acreages such as home gardens. Expense, inconsistent effectiveness, and limitations on application make most repellents a poor choice for large-scale agricultural crops.

HOME REMEDY REPELLENTS

Human Hair

Human hair is used by some as a repellent, however its' effectiveness is uncertain and/or short-lived. Hair should be placed in mesh bags or socks and suspended from plants to be protected or hung around the perimeter of cultivated areas. Bags containing about 1 handful of hair are placed at a height of 2 to 3 feet and spaced about 3 feet apart. Bags should be replaced several times during the growing season. Hair can be obtained easily and inexpensively from barbershops or beauty salons.

Guard Dogs

Instead of using hair, use the whole animal! A dog confined by an invisible fence or tethered in the yard or around the garden may frighten away deer or other intruders.

Milorganite

Milorganite is partially composted sewage that has been dried at an intense heat. It is also a high quality, slow-release fertilizer. Apply about 5 lbs per 100 square feet at two to four week intervals. It is reported to work well in spring and summer, but may be less effective in winter. Milorganite may be purchased from most landscape and garden supply stores.

Animal By-Products

Animal wastes or by-products, such as rotten meat scraps, blood meal and feather meal are placed in cheesecloth, nylon bags or such and suspended from plants or posts. These substances also can be spread on the ground or mixed with water for direct spray-application. Blood meal will act as a deer repellent and can fertilize your plants at the same time. Some success has been reported but many of these substances are found in nature and their effectiveness is uncertain.

Eggs and Egg Mixtures (including garlic and cayenne pepper)

About 4 to 6 raw eggs thoroughly mixed with one gallon of water can be sprayed directly on plants to repel deer. This simple, inexpensive treatment is often very effective, particularly for ornamentals, nursery stock, or small gardens. Try mixing raw eggs with liquid soap, hot cayenne pepper and garlic. Be sure to strain the mixture carefully before running it through your garden sprayer. Always test the mixture sparingly on a plant before making a wholesale application. The mix may damage some tender plants.

Soap

Some orchards have discouraged deer browsing by hanging bars of soap from trees or shrubs once per season. One paper-wrapped, motel-sized bar of deodorant soap per tree or shrub will work for individual trees. Drill a hole in the soap, tie a string or fishing line to the hole and suspend soap from a limb so that it hangs about 4 feet above the ground. Effective area of protection is about 3-feet. Irish Spring soap hung in a nylon stocking seems to be a popular favorite, but any scented soap probably will work. Deer may be more repelled by the animal fats used in soap making than with the actual perfume scent of the soap. Scented soap melted in water and sprayed directly on plant leaves also is reportedly effective.

Hanging bars of soap from trees may discourage deer

Naphthalene/Ammonia

Mothballs (naphthalene) or flakes also may be suspended in mesh bags or spread on the ground as area repellents. Mothballs should be replaced as they evaporate. Their effectiveness is questionable outdoors because the odor dissipates rapidly. Household ammonia is a general wildlife repellent. Rags are saturated with ammonia and put into milk jugs with cutout holes. These jugs are placed around the perimeter of a garden or small orchard and may serve to repel deer.

COMMERCIAL REPELLENTS

There are generally two categories of commercial repellents: odor and taste. Each type has different benefits depending on the situation. Other 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 summer time. If you are protecting edible plants, most 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. Addtionally, 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 or in dispensers (such as garlic oil clip on dispensers) 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 department, hardware, lawn and garden, or farm supply stores as well as online or contact the local WRD Game Management office for suggested retailers.

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.

Important Contacts

DNR Game Management Office
Phone: _____
Contact:_____

DNR Law Enforcement Office
Phone: _____
County Ranger: _____

UGA County Extension Office
Phone: _____
Contact:_____

Georgia Forestry Commission
Phone: _____
Contact:_____

Deer Damage Supplies
Item: _____ Business Contact: _____
Phone: _____ _____

Item: _____ Business Contact: _____
Phone: _____ _____

Item: _____ Business Contact: _____
Phone: _____ _____

Other Contacts
Phone: _____ Contact:_____

Phone: _____ Contact:_____

Phone: _____ Contact:_____

Phone: _____ Contact:_____

APPENDIX 1

Plants Known to Have a High Degree of Deer Tolerance

Jeff Jackson, Professor of Wildlife Management (retired)
Gary L. Wade, Extension Horticulturalist

TREES	
Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*)	Cherry Laurel (*Prunus caroliniana*)
Crape Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*)	Deodar Cedar (*Cedrus deodara*)
False Cypress (*Chamaecyparis spp.*)	Fir (*Abies spp.*)
Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*)	Gordonia (*Gordonia lisianthus*)
Leyland Cypress (*Cupressocyparis x leylandii*)	Most Hollies
Palms, windmill and needle palms are hardy in N. GA	Pines (*Pinus spp.*)
Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*)	River Birch (*Betula nigra*)
Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*)	Spruce (*Picea spp.*)
Sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*)	

SHRUBS	
Anise (*Illicium spp.*)	Bamboo (*Bambusa sp.*)
Banana Shrub (*Michelia fuscata*)	Barberry (*Berberis spp.*)
Bottlebrush, Striped and Red Buckeye (*Aesculus spp.*)	Boxwood (*Buxus spp.*)
Butterfly Bush (*Buddleia davidii*)	Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster spp.*)
Eleagnus (*Eleagnus pungens*)	Firethorn (*Pyracantha spp.*)
Forsythia, yellowbells (*Forsythia spp.*)	Gardenia (*Gardenia spp.*)
Heavenly Bamboo (*Nandina spp.*)	Holly, many species including Dwarf Yaupon, Japanese Holly, Rotunda Schellings Dwarf and Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*)
Japanese Rose (*Kerria japonica*)	Leatherleaf Mahonia (*Mahonia bealei*)
Oleander (*Nerium oleander*)	Ornamental grasses
Plum Yew (*Cephalotaxus*)	Spirea (*Calycanthus floridus*)
Viburnum (*Viburnum spp.*)	Winter Daphne (*Daphne spp.*)

VINES/GROUNDCOVER	
Bugleweed (*Ajuga spp.*)	Carolina Jessamine (*Gelsemim sempervirens*)
Cherokee Rose (*Rosa Laevigata*)	Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*)
Trumpetvine (*Bignonia capreolata*)	

Appendix 1 Continued on Next Page

ANNUALS	
Ageratum	Alyssum
Annual Periwinkle (*Catharanthus alba rosea*)	California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*)
Cleome	Coreopsis
Cornflower (*Cenaurea cyanus*)	Dusty Miller
Flowering Tobacco (*Nicotiana alata*)	Forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*)
Gaillardia (*Gaillardia pulchella*)	Lobelia (*Lobelia laxiflora*)
Marigold (*Tagetes spp.*)	Melampodium
Morning Glory (*Ipomea spp.*)	Parsley (*Petroselinum spp.*)
Pentas	Plectranthus
Poppy (*Papaver spp.*)	Scarlet Sage (*Salvia spp.*)
Snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*)	Sweet Pea (*Ipomea spp.*)
Verbena	Wax Begonia (*Begonia semperflorens*)
Zinnia (*Zinnia elegans*)	

Deer are the only native animals that routinely browse plants 4-5 feet above the ground.

DNR Publication
State of Georgia
Developed December 2001; Revised June 2008