

# White-tailed Deer

*(Odocoileus virginianus)*



Understanding the habits and habitats of wildlife, and taking appropriate measures to prevent unwanted encounters, will help everyone to continue to enjoy the wonderful wild resources that still exist in New Jersey.

## Coexisting with Deer

In most cases, the presence of a “nuisance animal” is just the “effect” half of a “cause and effect” scenario. The “cause” half is where our answers lie and is almost invariably a food source or an attractive habitat. The trick is to fix the cause. Merely removing animals does not work—as long as attractants remain, more animals from the surrounding area will simply take their place.

A better approach is to modify the habitat so it provides less food and shelter, which in turn encourages the animals to go elsewhere.

### There is a Fawn in My Yard!

If deer visit your property throughout the year, do not be surprised if you discover a fawn curled up, much like a sleeping cat, close to your house during May and June. This fawn is not abandoned and does not need your help. Its mother is nearby and will return to nurse it a few times a day.

### The best ways to get along with the deer that share our territories include:

- Plant deer-resistant plants
- Apply repellents
- Use scare devices
- Erect fences
- Install wildlife warning reflectors along roads
- Plantings, repellents, and scare devices tend to work better for low to moderate browsing problems; fencing works better for severe problems. It is important to analyze your deer situation before choosing a deterrent.

### Lyme Disease Misconception

White-tailed deer are not the only species to host the ticks that carry Lyme disease. Therefore, the removal of this one host does not stop the spread of the disease.

### Deer-Resistant Plants

Deer taste buds vary geographically and seasonally, and are largely dependent on what alternative plants are available. Check your local garden store or nursery for information about what types of plants seem resistant in your area. You can also contact your local Cooperative Extension Service for this information (in New Jersey, it's the Rutgers Cooperative Extension at [www.rce.rutgers.edu](http://www.rce.rutgers.edu)).

For a list of the plants—annuals and biennials, ground covers and vines, perennials and bulbs, and shrubs and trees—that deer avoid, as well as those they seem to prefer, visit The Fund for Animals web site at [www.fund.org](http://www.fund.org)

### Homemade Deer Repellent

Blend together 2 cups of water, 5 cloves of garlic, 1 cup of chopped onions, and 5 tablespoons of powdered hot pepper. Pour into a covered container and let stand for 24 hours. Strain and mix with 1 gallon of water. Apply to plants with a sprayer.



## About Mercer County Wildlife Center

The Mercer County Wildlife Center is a state and federally licensed facility that cares for injured, ill and displaced wildlife. The Center provides these animals with the medical treatment and a temporary refuge before releasing them back into an appropriate wild habitat.

For more information regarding the work we do and the animals who share our environment, including a series of printable brochures that provide tips for coexisting peacefully with those animals, visit us online at:  
[www.mercercounty.org/departments/mercer-county-park-commission/wildlife-center](http://www.mercercounty.org/departments/mercer-county-park-commission/wildlife-center)

For information on protecting bee hives and livestock, contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife Wildlife Control Unit at (908) 735-8793.

### Repellents

Repellents are products that are applied to or near plants in an attempt to disrupt and reduce deer browsing. The effectiveness of repellents varies and depends on a number of factors:

- Seasonal changes in plant palatability
- Local deer taste preferences and nutritional needs
- Availability of alternative foods
- Time of year
- Deer density

Type of repellent and concentration of active ingredients will determine the durability of the repellent and how often it is applied. The most effective repellents tend to be those that produce sulfurous odors and are considered “fear-inducing.” These repellents depend completely on detection through odor. It is believed that deer associate a sulphur smell with the presence (or carnage) of a predator. Other repellents include those that taste bitter or that cause irritation on contact, such as those that contain hot pepper.

### Scare Devices

Another way to deter deer is to scare them. However, deer tend to habituate to most scare devices over time. Some devices include:

- Scarecrow motion-activated sprinkler
- Havahart #5250 “Electronic Deer Repellent”
- Ultrasonic devices

#### Fencing options include:

- Electric fences
- Woven wire fencing or plastic mesh
- Seedling protectors (tubes that surround seedlings)

### Avoiding Deer-Vehicle Collisions

- **Be vigilant:** Watch from side to side, especially in areas of low visibility or where roadside shrubs or grasses are close to the road.
- **Watch for groups:** Deer tend to travel in groups. If one deer crosses the road, watch for more to follow.
- **Be aware of seasons:** Autumn is mating and hunting season, so bucks are on the move. From May through June, yearlings are seeking new territories.
- **Be aware of time of day:** Deer are most active at dawn and dusk.
- **Use high beams:** At night, use your high beams to see farther ahead. Slow down and watch for the eye-shine of deer near the road edges.
- **Drive straight:** If at all possible, do not swerve to avoid wildlife but brake firmly. Swerving may cause deer to run into the vehicle rather than away from it.

White-tailed deer have adapted extremely well to our human-created environments—perhaps too well.

### Want to Learn More?

A big “thank you” to The Fund for Animals for providing the information in this pamphlet. For more details about deer, including deer-resistant plants, repellents, and fencing options, visit The Fund for Animals web site at [www.fund.org](http://www.fund.org) and link to their website.



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[www.mercercounty.org/parks](http://www.mercercounty.org/parks)

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Dan Benson, County Executive

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