



Yard & Garden





Deer and rabbits can eat many garden plants down to the ground.

Protect Your Garden From Hungry Animals

Homes full of garden beds with blooming flowers and foliage can seem warm and inviting. Planting flowers is one of the easiest ways to transform the appearance of a home with minimal effort and expense. Too often homeowners plant annuals and perennials only to find their hard work has been damaged by hungry animals, like deer, rabbits and underground pests. There are ways to keep animals away from plants – many of which are humane and environmentally safe.

Keeping furry marauders away from the garden is something individuals who live in rural or suburban areas have to consider when planting. Many communities are growing and encroaching on the natural habitats of wild animals. With some of their natural food sources diminishing, animals may decide to partake of the easy pickings that come from residential home gardens.

If you understand how these animals feed, you can take precautions to restrict access to planting beds. Rabbits tend to munch on vegetables and ornamental plants. Small in stature and not able to scale fences very easily, rabbits might be deterred by a low fence surrounding plants. Consider digging some chicken wire below the fence a few inches to discourage digging under the fence. The fence should be 18 inches high, and you should keep the openings no more than one inch because rabbits can squeeze through small openings.

In terms of gophers, moles, voles, and other burrowing animals, the key is preventing underground access. Chicken wire or another abrasive material put under the garden soil can help keep underground animals from burrowing under and then up into the heart of the garden.

Deer are another story alto-

gether. They are tall animals capable of rising up on hind legs to stretch out and reach branches of trees and bushes. Therefore, taller fences may be needed to protect the garden. But these can sometimes be unsightly, especially in a front yard. Therefore, look for natural barriers that can keep them out. They may be deterred by thorny bushes or plants. Daisies, papaver (poppies), narcissus, rudbeckia, achillea, agastache, aster, lupine, coreopsis, verbascum, centaurea, and echinacea are available in many varieties and are not attractive to deer or rabbits.

Here are some additional strategies that you can try.

- Create narrow pathways between raised beds. Rabbits will feel like they are in prime locations for predators to get at them in this type of situation and may be less likely to venture in. Deer may not be able to navigate narrow paths.
- Use mulch. In addition to benefiting the plants, keeping soil moist and fertilizing the areas, mulch also deters many animals.
- Interplant different species of plants. Some animals don't want to bother picking tasty plants out among other varieties they don't like. So mix plants with ones that animals find unpleasant.
- Use other natural deterrents. Animals may be kept away by scents of their predators. Urine from coyote, foxes, dogs, and cats may help. You can also try human hair, cat litter and soap flakes.
- Create an animal-friendly area elsewhere. Feed the deer and rabbits the foods they love somewhere away from your garden. They may fill up with favorites and stay away from your flowers and vegetables.
- Traps may work. As a last resort, use humane traps to collect animals and release them elsewhere.

How to prevent lawn damage

Many homeowners aspire toward a pristine and lush lawn. For some a nice lawn gives them feelings of pride. Others believe a perfect lawn enables them to have the best-looking house in the neighborhood. Many homeowners spend hours outdoors perfecting their lawns or spend a good deal of money hiring professionals to make their lawn more appealing. But just because a lawn looks good now doesn't mean it will look good later. That's because delicate grass can be damaged by a number of different factors.

GRUBS

Grubs are not very lawn-friendly. Grubs are actually the larval stage of different types of large beetles. These worm-like creatures feed on the roots of grass and are able to kill large sections of the lawn in a relatively short amount of time. It can sometimes be difficult to discern whether grubs, drought or another other pest has damaged a lawn. One way to check is to grab a portion of the damaged lawn and attempt to peel it back. If it comes back easily like a piece of carpet, it's likely grubs. Spotting grubs underneath is a sure sign these larvae are killing the lawn.

Using an insecticide for grub control in July can help kill off grubs that start hatching in August through September. Grub eggs do well in sunny patches of lawn that are well watered. More shade may deter them. There's also the option of letting the lawn go dormant and not watering it, but you will be left with a brown, unappealing lawn.

PET URINE

Pets can also damage a lawn. Pet urine can create burnt patches and significant discoloration on the lawn, particularly if the dog or cat uses one area consistently as their potty zone.

The best way to prevent urine damage is to walk your dog so that he or she will not have free reign of the yard. However, sometimes dogs get out or stray cats and dogs visit your yard and relieve themselves without your knowledge. So this method is not foolproof. Therefore, you should take added action to maintain a lush lawn.

First, make sure that soil and lawn is in good health by fertilizing and taking care of it properly. Second, water can dilute urine and neutralize its corrosive properties. Some have found that diluted urine can often act as a fertilizer to grass. You may have noticed that the outside ring of a urine-burned spot is often greener than the healthy lawn. Try to dilute the urine prior to 8 hours having elapsed for the best effect.

BURROWING ANIMALS

Moles and voles are among the more common lawn damage culprits. Voles are small rodents that resemble mice but have stouter bodies, shorter tails and rounder heads. They feast on everything from bulbs, succulent roots, ground cover, and even dead animals in their paths. Their burrows enable them to move around relatively undetected, typically until the damage has already been done.

Moles, although they have a similar-sounding name, are not related to voles and look very different. They have a cylindrical body shape with velvety fur, very small or invisible ears and large paws for digging. Moles often feed on earthworms and other small invertebrates found in the soil. The burrows they create are essentially traps for the worms, who fall into the burrows, where moles easily access them. Moles often stockpile worms for later consumption in underground larders.

Voles can be kept away with natural vole pred-



Preventing lawn damage includes cleaning up after pets, whose urine can cause discoloration in the yard.

ators, such as cats, hawks, owls and snakes. Mouse traps can also capture voles when baited. You may also dig sharp materials or chicken wire into your soil around planting beds to make it uncomfortable for voles and moles to tunnel through.

Moles can also be controlled with traps. Finding active mole tunnels will help you place the traps effectively to either kill or simply contain the mole. The live animal can be relocated to a site where they won't cause trouble.

Lawn damage can occur through a number of different factors. Finding out the cause can help you find an effective treatment.

Maintain Healthy Soil Through the Season

A lush lawn and garden is a part of many homeowners' dream home. A lawn that emanates green and a garden that's home to succulent vegetables is desirable to homeowners across the country.

Of course, such lawns and gardens take time and effort, and a host of factors will determine if a lawn and garden is something homeowners should be proud or ashamed of. One such factor is soil health. Healthy soil helps deliver food and water to plants, allowing them to thrive and add aesthetic appeal to homes. To maintain healthy soil, homeowners should consider the following tips.

- Get the soil tested. When addressing soil health, it's best to first get the soil tested. A soil test will show which type of soil you have as well as its makeup and structure, and just how good or bad it currently is. Such tests can also reveal if the soil is missing any essential nutrients. Some soil tests can be conducted by novice green-thumbs, while others are best left to the local agricultural bureau. These tests are a good investment, as they will remove the guesswork from fertilizing. With-



Gardeners can take several steps to maintain soil health.

out a soil test, many homeowners end up overdoing it when fertilizing, which can prove a costly mistake. Take a soil sample a few months before you plan to plant or landscape to give yourself enough time to apply the test's recommendations to your lawn and garden.

- Avoid wet soil. When soil is wet, don't walk or drive over it and keep the kids out of the yard. When wet soil is walked on or driven over, the

soil gets packed down, pushing out air and making it more difficult and sometimes impossible for water to pass through the soil. That makes it hard for roots to grow. Gardeners who plan to plant this gardening season should wait for the soil to dry before planting.

- Use well-drained soil. Well-drained soil will dry fast and enable oxygen to reach the root zone, helping build stronger roots as a result. Plants with strong roots are more likely to survive severe weather.

• Use compost. Compost can prove very beneficial to soil health. Organic compost is typically loaded with nutrients that, upon maturity, feed the soil and promote soil health. Biodegradable items like grass clippings, leaves and even excess food like apple cores can strengthen the compost. Even worms, which break down compost quickly and add nutrients, can be a valuable addition to organic compost.

- Don't bash bacteria. Bacteria is often seen as a formidable foe, but some bacteria can actually promote healthy soil. Bacteria decompose plant matter, releasing the nutritive value into the soil, and can also

break down chemical pesticides. So while bacteria is bad more often than it's beneficial, some bacteria are quite useful, particularly when it comes to healthy soil.

- Don't be scared off by slime. Like bacteria, slime has a bad reputation. However, veteran gardeners understand that reputation isn't warranted. Slime mold is ugly, and many new gardeners see it and instantly assume it's bad for their garden. However, slime molds are good for the soil, helping break down dead wood and leaves. They might not add aesthetic appeal, but slime molds do serve a practical and important purpose in maintaining healthy soil.

• Pests can be an ally to healthy soil. Some garden pests like mites, millipedes and centipedes are incorrectly assumed to be enemies of healthy soil. In fact, such pests can vastly improve soil health. Mites consume dead leaves and additional plant matter, enabling bacteria to more effectively release nutrients into the soil. Millipedes and centipedes are also beneficial to soil, as their droppings improve both the soil's texture and fertility.

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