



Alamosa's Urban Deer Problem: Part 2

by Marilyn Loser

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What might be the consequences of not harvesting deer in Alamosa? The September 12 column presented an overview of our deer problem and discussed culling the herd. This column discusses “doing nothing” to the deer directly.

I stated in the previous column that doing nothing will yield an increase in the Alamosa deer population. Perhaps the herd population will soon stabilize as suggested in Kent Webb’s recent letter to the editor. On the other hand he comments that “you may be seeing more deer this year in the urban area if you are having drought in your area.” And indeed, we are experiencing drought.

I love my yard. I’ve heard some say, forget your flowers, and just enjoy the deer. Humbug! In this stress-ridden world, my garden is my refuge and retreat. It helps me maintain my sanity. Even in the winter, I stand in the garden and feel peace and comfort flow through me from the ground up.

So what can we do to coexist with the deer? They eat an average of seven pounds of food per day. I don’t think fencing them out of the city is viable, although I get a brief mental image of a drawbridge and moat surrounding our town. Opps, deer can swim well!

Realistically, you have few options if your yard has any vegetation. 1) Keep deer out of your garden and/or yard. 2) Protect individual specimens. 3) Plant deer-resistant species. 4) Enjoy deer in your yard.

Fence your entire yard or garden. 8-ft high fencing is frequently recommended. (May need zoning variance for a fence over 6-ft in high in Alamosa). Wood fencing is expensive and may keep out desired light, views, and neighbors but is effective. Dr. Perry, Extension Professor at the University of Vermont says a 6-ft wood fence is adequate. “Such privacy fences are quite effective, as deer can't tell what is on the other side. Even if they can smell what is on the other side, and it's attractive to them, they can't be sure that danger isn't lurking there as well.”

Black polypropylene mesh fencing is available and many people seem satisfied with it. Some types have small mesh while others have 1.75-in mesh and heights range from 4 ft to 7.5 ft. I’ve heard some people say that they don’t even notice it – I do. Perhaps if I had 10 acres and my home was in the middle, I wouldn’t notice the mesh at a distance, but city yards are much smaller and the fencing is very noticeable. Deer don’t see stationary objects very well so you might want to tie white cloth strips about 4 ft high at 12 foot intervals to keep them from running into your fence.

Another option is to build a slanted fence at a 45-degree angle with the top facing away from your yard or build 2 fences 4 ft high and 4 ft apart. Deer can’t jump both high and wide.

You can also fence individual trees. Just make sure the deer can't reach over or through the fencing.

Deer repellants come in many forms. You may have to try several to see what works for you. Some people swear human hair works, while other shake their heads saying it didn't work for them. Others say deodorant soap works while one blogger wrote that he got tired of picking up pieces of Irish Spring around his yard imprinted with deer tooth marks.

There are both commercial and home-made repellants. Ingredients include putrescent egg, garlic, capsaicin, chile and mustard oils, dried blood, and coyote urine. One drawback is that they need to be replenished frequently.

There are also motion-activated devices such as radios (sure to annoy neighbors), lights, and sprinklers. Online customer responses did not encourage me to purchase any of these devices.

Plant deer –resistant specimens. The key word here is “resistant.” Deer usually avoid strong, smelly plants, thick or leathery leaves, and fuzzy, bristly or spiny plants. However, in Alamosa they will chomp away at young Colorado spruce and lilacs which are on most deer-resistant plant lists (many lists are available online).

I encourage the Alamosa City Council to set up a deer task force. The force should find out consequences and costs of various forms of deer management. This would include costs of culling herds and vehicle repair due to collisions with deer. The force should also find out what other Colorado cities have done, what Colorado statutes have to say on the subject, and should meet with informed decision makers (such as Colorado Parks and Wildlife personnel). Then the force should find out what Alamosans want based on the research.

"I have reached illusion's end in this grove of falling leaves. Each leaf a signal of past joy, drifting here within my heart." Mu Dan