

Living with Urban Deer

About our deer

Columbian black-tailed deer are native to BC, ranging from the central coast of BC along the coastline into California. They're part of the natural environment that makes southern Vancouver Island such an extraordinary place to live.

Black-tailed deer thrive near forest edges, using the underbrush for foraging and cover. Wooded urban environments like golf courses, parks and roadside greenbelts are common places to find them.

Black-tailed deer favour the growing tips of trees and shrubs but they'll also consume fruit, nuts, acorns, fungi and lichens. Mating occurs in November and December during rutting season.

Does don't give birth until their second or third year, and then usually to a single fawn. After the fourth or fifth year, twin births are normal. If you see three or more fawns behind a doe, it's likely that doe is caring for a fawn whose mother has died.

Human-deer conflicts

How can I reduce my chances of hitting a deer with my vehicle?

It's important to slow down in areas deer are known to frequent, and keep your eyes on high alert, scanning the sides of the road ahead, especially at night. If you see one deer, slow down—they're rarely alone and others may follow behind or dart out in your path at the last minute. Headlights will confuse deer and may cause them to freeze or act unpredictably.

Young deer may not recognize vehicles as a threat. Additionally, their hooves can slip on slick pavement and they can fall in front of your vehicle when attempting to jump away. Pay attention to provincial deer-crossing signs and other seasonal warning signs put up by concerned community members in areas where deer are especially abundant. They're there for your protection.

Why is that deer following me?

If you're out walking, particularly in the early morning or evening, it's not unusual to see a deer. Usually they ignore you, stare at you with curiosity, or walk or run away.

But during fawning season (spring and summer), does, like any mother, have a strong instinct to protect their young from harm. You may not see yourself as a threat, but from the doe's point of view, you might be, especially if you have a dog with you. She may turn toward you and stare directly at you, she may even take a few steps toward you, or follow you for a distance.

It's important to understand the doe's behaviour. Even if you don't see a fawn, chances are there are one or two nearby. Just as we protect our children from a potential predator, the doe wants you and your dog far away from her babies. If you come across a deer while walking:

- Change your route by simply crossing the street or walking in the opposite direction, or both
- Be alert when walking your dog, and always keep your dog on a leash
- Be yard-wise, always check your yard for deer before letting your dog out

I found a fawn

Black-tailed deer reduce the risk of a predator finding their fawns by hiding them. Does will leave the fawn alone for long periods during the day to forage, only returning for short periods to allow the youngster to nurse. It's common for the mother to feed and sleep a considerable distance from her fawn.

When the fawn isn't nursing, it will curl up in its bedding site, often in tall grassy areas, and lay motionless. The general advice is to leave the fawn alone, as the mother is likely nearby and will care for it when you leave. Don't handle the fawn. If it appears cold, weak, thin or injured, or you can clearly see parasites on its body, call WildArc for guidance. If you find a seemingly healthy fawn but the mother hasn't returned in over 12 hours, also call WildArc at (250) 478-9453. They'll advise you on what to do next.

Making your yard deer-resistant

Through the use of sprays, fences and/or landscaping with deer-resistant plants, you can minimize the damage to your garden and encourage deer to spend time foraging in other areas.

Repellents

No repellent eliminates deer damage entirely, but they can discourage bad feeding habits or reduce foraging on new or budding plants. Deer can become accustomed to the same repellent over time, and eventually ignore it. Alternating repellents may help keep deer confused and more wary of eating your plants.

Deer-resistant plants

Whether or not a particular plant will be eaten depends upon several factors: the deer's nutritional needs, its previous feeding experience, how tasty the plant is, the time of year, and availability of wild foods.

Deer develop predictable travel patterns, and prior damage is often a good indicator of potential future problems. Any new plantings added to an existing landscape or garden already suffering from deer damage will likely be browsed again, so take preventative measures as a first step if possible.

Fencing

A common concern about fencing is a feeling of isolation from our neighbours—if I have a 10-foot high fence, I'll never see anybody!

The reality is that you can get creative with exclusion. For example, selectively fence areas you want to protect from wildlife—such as vegetable plots or dahlia beds—and landscape other areas of your yard with foliage that is less attractive to wildlife, or won't suffer much harm from an occasional nibble.

For further tips and information, please go to the Urban Wildlife Stewardship Society website at uwss.ca

