

Guest column



Easy with Growing the Instant Organic Gardener Handling pesky garden pests by Don Rosenberg

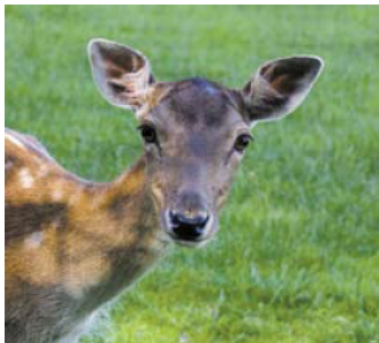
So you've built a raised bed garden, filled it with organic potting soil and the seeds have sprouted into lush, green plants. Turns out you're not the only one eyeing your vegetables – there are all sorts of critters out there hoping to make a meal out of your entire garden. There's nothing more frustrating than walking out to the lettuce patch, only to find little stubs!

So who's after your garden, and what are safe ways to protect your harvest?

Deer, rabbits and destruction

Deer and rabbits are by far the most destructive pests in the home garden.

So how can you tell the culprit? Just look at the leaves – deer crush their food, so the remains are torn and shredded; rabbits have sharp little teeth and their damage looks like the work of scissors. Another way to tell what's gobbling up your greens is to look for droppings – rabbits leave little, pea-sized pellets, while deer leave oval-shaped droppings that are less than an inch long.



you don't have to keep reapplying it. Just spray it around your landscape, but not in your garden.

Rabbits, squirrels and more resources

Rabbits are another critter that causes lots of garden damage. You leave your lettuce and spinach in the evening and in the morning all that's left are little green stumps – very frustrating! The good news is that rabbits are easier to repel than deer. In fact, the most common ingredient in the commercial repellants is something you can buy at any garden center. Blood meal is just that – dried blood. Sounds awful, but the smell drives rabbits away and it's also an organic fertilizer. Even better is the fact that it costs a lot less than commercial repellants – a five-pound bag might be \$5, vs. \$15 for a repellant. The only problem is that you have to reapply after the rain, but it's fertilizer, so it does some good for your garden.



It helps to put the culprits into several groups – bugs, critters and pets. Bugs are a real pain, but they don't eat your entire garden overnight and there are effective organic pesticides and other controls. I'll focus today on the bigger critters – usually furry ones – who can consume your entire garden overnight; I'll save damage from cats and dogs for another time.

Detering deer: The goal is to discourage feeding from the start. You don't want them to think of your yard as a buffet. There are several home remedies to implement, including spreading hair clippings and soap in areas where deer are not welcome.

A good home remedy to try is very simple to create. Take an egg white and mix it well into a gallon of water and spray the mixture around your yard. It will smell like rotten eggs, but is so diluted only the deer can smell it.

Dogs are also good deer deterrents. Drastic remedies include six-to-10-foot-high fencing and electronic devices. Electric fencing is actually very effective in severe cases.

There are all sorts of products you can buy to deter deer. Some of the stranger ones are coyote and mountain lion urine; these don't appeal to me much! Some deer-detering products are not organic and can't be used on garden crops. One product I recommend is Bobbex, which is a spray that makes vegetation taste awful to deer. Its best quality is that it doesn't wash off in the rain, so

Squirrels are often seen digging in your garden, but they're usually burying or digging up nuts, not hurting your plants – at least on purpose. Many of my clients reported squirrels were eating their tomatoes last year. The reason is not that they like Italian food, but they're thirsty and after your tomatoes for the water content. A simple solution is to put out a pan of water – they'll drink it instead of your tomatoes!

If these home remedies don't work for you, a great Chapel Hill, N.C.-based company called I Must Garden makes safe, organic repellants for all kinds of annoying critters. Their products can be purchased at some local garden centers and organic plant-care stores, or ordered online at www.imustgarden.com.

If you have any other suggestions or tips for keeping critters out of your garden, e-mail gardener@thecharlotteweekly.com. □

A regular Charlotte Weekly columnist, Rosenberg is the creator of the Instant Organic Garden. For more information, visit www.instantorganicgarden.com.

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