

# Wildlife Interference

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT

Determining what nuisance wildlife exists on your property is an ongoing series of observations. A gardener who discovers plant damage caused by unwanted animals has choices. He/she can decide to tolerate the damage, peacefully co-existing with the animal. Or he can turn it into a battle of the wits. The animals can be deer, squirrel, raccoon, rabbit, chipmunk, skunk, groundhog, vole, mole, goose or even birds.

Animal populations change. Increase in the population could come about if their natural habitat has been altered by new construction in the vicinity or conditions were right for an

increase in offspring. We call that an increase in animal “pressure.” A decrease in pressure could occur if a disease affects them.

You won’t always see the animal munching on your garden. Sometimes the damage is done at night or when there are no people around to observe. Sometimes you can tell by the plant damage what critter was responsible, but often you cannot.

Planning a new or modified design with animal presence as a factor allows you to assess your site realistically.

### ACTIVITIES

(adapted from Dr. Paul Curtis, Cornell University)

#### 1. Find out if you have voles

##### MATERIALS:

FRESH APPLES

KNIFE

PIECES OF ROOFING SHINGLE OR BOARDS

Cut a whole apple vertically through the core into 14-16 slices. Locate areas in planting beds or gardens with thick mulch, weed, or grass cover. Meadow voles leave evidence of runways at the ground surface in areas with thick cover.

Pine voles have 1-2 inch burrow openings to underground tunnel systems. Place an apple slice in a runway or near a burrow entrance. Cover with a piece of wood or roofing shingle about one foot square. Place apple slices about 10-15 feet apart in the garden or planting bed where you are monitoring. Check the apple slices 24 hours later. Follow up with trapping at sites where apple slices are chewed or missing.

ESTIMATED TIME:15-20 MINUTES



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## 2. Visual Observation

### MATERIALS:

#### NONE FOR INVESTIGATION ACTIVITY

Examine woody ornamentals for evidence of deer feeding damage. Deer have no upper incisors, so they leave ragged, torn edges on limbs and plants. Examine evergreen plants that deer favor, such as yews, arborvitae, rhododendron, and fruit trees for evidence of torn limbs up to 6 feet in height. If deer are abundant in the neighborhood, browse lines will be evident on evergreens.



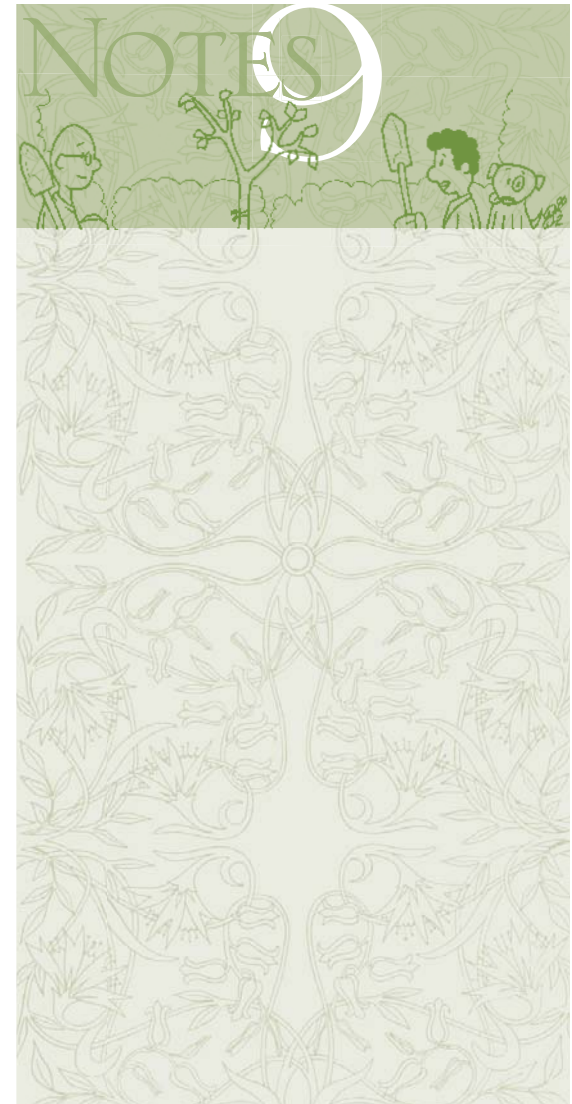
DEER BROWSING ON ARBORVITAE

ESTIMATED TIME: 10 MINUTES

In this Step, we are assessing where a few kinds

of wildlife can pose a challenge for landscape or garden management. There is no foolproof test. The two tests we do here do not predict if you have other kinds of animals who patrol on your property. There are no good tests for detecting groundhogs, for instance. Also, remind yourself that some animals pass through but do no detectible damage and may be welcome on your property.

Damage by your own or your neighbors pets is a different issue. Often the damage from dogs, for instance, comes from their habit of digging holes, which disturb plant roots. Other dogs do damage to the garden by running over plants; straight paths give dogs a chance to run and minimize garden damage.



## USING WHAT YOU FOUND IN THIS STEP

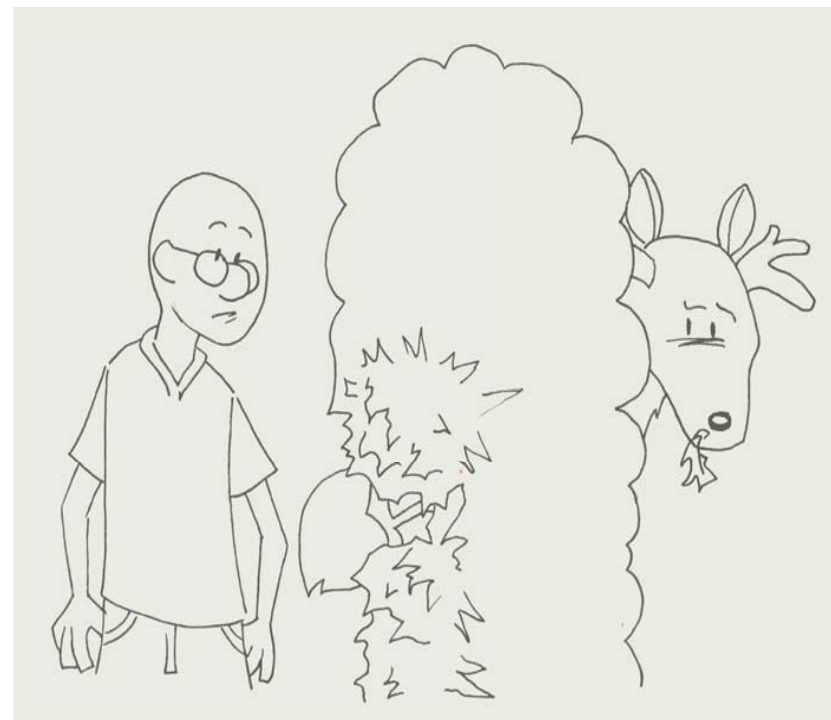
No plants are nuisance animal-proof. Often the prediction that a new plant will not be favored by the animal is dependent on the animal pressure or how desperately hungry it is.

Talk with your neighbors on what they have observed. It is better not to assume that that you have animals on your property, just because your neighbors have them. It would be equally short sighted to assume that no hungry animals visit your property.

If you have voles, ordinary mouse traps may help reduce their population. For other options, review vole information on Northeast Wildlife Damage Management Publications below.

If deer damage to shrubs is severe, wrap plants in wire cages or bird netting with stakes. In extreme cases, it may be necessary to erect high fences surrounding your property or a specialized garden, such as a home orchard or vegetable garden. Alternatives to netting are repellents. Some work better than others; some work for a while, but not forever. Generally, repellents that work by emitting strong smells, such as rotten eggs, are better than those that deter by adding an unpleasant taste on the plant

for deer to eat. For a review of repellents, see the Deer Defenses website below. In many cases, dogs keep deer away. There are a few plants that deer rarely eat, such as boxwood, daffodils, spruce or pachysandra. However, there is no definitive list of deer-resistant plants. Many lists are distributed with local observations, but none are foolproof.



## FOR FURTHER READING

Deer Defenses <http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/factsheets/deerdef/index.html>

Information from your local state agency for environmental conservation. (D.E.C. in New York State.)

Northeast Wildlife Damage Management Publications <http://wildlifecontrol.info/NEWDMC/Publications.html>

