

# Backyard Harmony



From cat litter and dog hair to sweaty socks and shiny objects, gardeners share secrets to keeping our digging, nibbling neighbors at bay

*We're all animal lovers, right? So what's so difficult about sharing our backyard bounties with our fellow earth travelers?*

*For gardeners, that's easier said than done. Even the most humane among us can get cranky when the kale becomes a midnight bunny snack and the sunflowers lose their heads to a feasting woodchuck before the first bloom.*

*Recently we asked HSUS supporters for advice. Among our favorite tips: Enlist best friends (wrap bulbs in dog fur) as well as large predators (encourage husbands to relieve themselves around garden beds).*

*The effectiveness of such remedies often depends on garden location and gardener patience. And the real key is prevention: resistant natives or mixed plantings that make plowing down one type of flower or vegetable more difficult. "I simply plant things deer don't like to eat!" writes MJ McGee of Wellesley, Mass.*

*A simpler and more rewarding strategy is to embrace coexistence. Says deer lover SR DuVal of Woodland, Wash., "why would we chase such beauty away?" Sightings of foxes, turkeys, and other animals inspire Cindie White-Weiss to create habitat for even more species, including snakes and lizards, in her Duxbury, Mass., yard. "It is a privilege," she writes, "to have wildlife call my garden home."*

*Here are ideas for living in harmony with wild friends and smelling the flowers, too.*

## TIPS FROM HSUS SUPPORTERS

### Cease and Resist

One way to foil garden marauders is through repellents: irritants or bad odors or tastes applied directly to the area needing protection. For best results, apply early and often, especially after rain or snow, and only when animals have other foods available; in times such as late winter or early spring, not even the nastiest concoction can deter a hungry critter.

I've had great success by using soap shavings. The stronger the scent, the better. Coast or Irish Spring has worked best. Just spread a little around the base of fruit trees or scatter in the garden. I throw a few pieces of soap in the dirt before covering newly planted bulbs to keep the squirrels away. Even though deer still visit my yard, they now eat other plants or clover. I've heard that animals get used to the scent after a while, but this has worked for years in my garden. — VALERIE MCMILLAN, DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

*Other writers suggested making a solution of Irish Spring and water that can be sprayed onto vulnerable plants, or stuffing bars of the soap into pantyhose and tying onto the limbs of trees and bushes.*





When I was growing up on our ranch in northern California, my mother would take a pair of Dad's socks, dirty and sweaty from working in the fields all day, and tie them to a pole in our field garden. The smell of this human scent never failed to keep the deer from nibbling on the fruits and vegetables!

— MARJORIE NOTHERN, DANVILLE, CALIFORNIA

I have a long-haired German shepherd who has lots of hair to brush. I spread his hair over the ground where my bulbs are. When planting new bulbs, I wrap each bulb in dog hair. If I don't have enough of his hair (which is seldom!), I get some from the dog groomer. My tulips, hyacinths, crocuses, and daffodils all bloom year after year. The deer come right up to the windows, but they leave my flowers alone.

— MARY ANNE MUPO, EDGERTON, WISCONSIN

I love watching the deer, groundhogs, squirrels, raccoons, opossums, turkeys, and chipmunks near my home. For

the most part the animals are respectful of my garden, but once in a while, they stray from our agreement (as do my neighbor's goats). In a glass jar, I mix 3 tablespoons of 90K heat unit cayenne pepper with  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of vegetable, canola, corn, or sunflower seed oil,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup vinegar (any type), and  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup water. I shake it well and let it sit for a day or so until the pepper settles to the bottom, then carefully pour the liquid into a spray bottle and spray my plants. Be sure to wear gloves and protective eyewear, especially if it is windy. After it rains hard or we've had a couple of showers, I respray. Wash your harvest well before eating or cooking to remove the residue. Most of the time, the animals will not touch the plants, and if they do, it's only one bite.

— LAUREL GALVAN, BOONE, NORTH CAROLINA

*This formulation is similar to commercial capsaicin-based repellents such as Critter Ridder and may last longer than direct applications of cayenne pepper or tabasco sauce.*

## Taboo Treatments

For gardeners who want neighborhood critters to stop devouring the tomato seedlings but don't wish them bodily harm, poisons, lethal traps, and glue boards are obvious products to avoid. Here are a few less obviously problematic methods.

### Predator pee?

**Leave it be.** Given the amount of the stuff on the market, predator urine—supposedly the byproduct of coyotes, foxes, bobcats, and other animals—probably comes from fur farms, where animals are kept in small cages and commonly killed by gassing, neck breaking, or electrocution. Leave the predator urine on the shelf and let stores that sell it know you don't approve.

**It's a trap!** You might think you're doing Ms. Groundhog a favor by baiting her into a live trap and releasing her to the beautiful park just a few miles away. But she might have babies stashed nearby who could starve if she can't find her way back. And odds are heavily stacked against animals who are moved; they don't know where to find food, shelter, or water, and they could be attacked by predators.



I spray my flowers and bushes that deer love to eat with a product called Liquid Fence. It smells really bad so the deer won't touch anything that it's on. It also keeps rabbits from eating plants. Just remember to be downwind when you spray it.

— LAURA GURAL, TOMS RIVER, NEW JERSEY

Our backyard bird feeder was attracting unwanted rodent visitors. I strewed my cat's used (pre-scooped) biodegradable pine litter beneath the feeder and near the rats' presumed points of entry, and it has worked. The litter loses its aromatic potency over time, but my cat has been making more to replenish the supply.

— MARY KAY OGDEN, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

As a wildlife rehabber myself, I take hundreds of calls each year just on this topic: bears in garbage cans, raccoons in attics, deer eating ornamental shrubs, etc. One of the things I tell a lot of people is to consider creating a human urine barrier around the problem area. What better opportunity to offer your

husband and his buddies the option to play poker in the garage and then to pee out in the yard in between hands (of course only if they are in a rural area). Other alternatives are to use a gallon jug and pour it out once everyone is done. The urine should be strategically poured around the base of the plant or grass (not to exceed a single pouring, as urine can also backfire to kill other plants).

— LIZ NICHOLAS, BLUE RIDGE, GEORGIA

## Stumbling Blocks

Physical barriers such as fencing are some of the most effective and permanent ways of excluding wild animals from the garden. Also consider netting, bulb cages and gopher baskets, and plant covers.

I love my garden but was horrified when my neighbor trapped the woodchucks who were eating it and I found three starved babies days later. I vowed never to let anyone trap in my neighborhood again. My daughter put a 4-foot chicken wire fence around my garden, attached loosely to stakes (woodchucks don't seem to climb wobbly mesh), and with a 1-foot mesh "apron" extending away from the garden so they couldn't dig under (she pinned the mesh to the ground with landscaping staples). The woodchucks spent the entire summer circling my garden but not getting in it! And I got to watch them raise their young—which was a real treat.

— DORIS GIMBEL, BETHANY, CONNECTICUT



To deter rabbits from eating tulip bulbs, place rosebush branches above where the bulbs are planted in the flower beds. The more thorns, the better!

— MARY UTT, ORLEANS, MASSACHUSETTS

Place flexible green garden fencing around trees, using posts for support. Secure the fence about 1½ feet off the ground, to allow mowing around the base of the trees, with the top just high enough to prevent feeding from above. Overall, the fence should be 3 feet tall, which is half of a fence, so one fence can be cut in half to make two barriers.

— L. VAUGHAN, UTICA, PENNSYLVANIA

We had cutworms ruining our tomato plants. A friend suggested sinking a plastic cup with the bottom cut out about ¼ inch into the ground, around the base of the seedling when first planted. The cutworms can't climb it because it is slick, and we get pesticide-free tomatoes!

— CARRIE SUMMER RAIN CHAPMAN, ORLANDO, FLORIDA

I love to plant daffodil bulbs in the fall and found that the squirrels especially were digging them up right after I planted them. I placed small pieces of slate, old flowerpots, and medium-sized rocks over the daffodils to get them through the winter. Once the bulbs came up and started to bloom, they were fine. — KATHERINE RYAN, SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT



## Scare Tactics

Besides repellents, aversive conditioning techniques include acoustical alarms, scarecrows, scare balloons and tape, sprinklers, and lights and lasers. Use consistently and move around so animals don't become acclimated, and don't harass the animal to the point that she can't escape from the stimulus.

In response to the deer who keep eating his wife's roses, a friend of mine has established a system that uses a motion sensor to start his irrigation system. Last time I checked, it was still working.

— LAURA LIGGETT, MARIETTA, GEORGIA

*Our wildlife experts also recommend the motion-activated Contech ScareCrow sprinkler system.*



I use the reflective side of "dead" CDs to keep crows away from my backyard. They must be placed close to the area crows happen to like—in our case, below the tree branches. We've watched the crows go from tree branch to tree branch in order to avoid the glare of the CDs! — DENI ALBRECHT, AUBURN, CALIFORNIA

*Though fascinating creatures who should be welcome in any wildlife-friendly backyard, crows can be indiscriminate diners. To protect the fruits of their labor, some gardeners also hang CDs from garden stakes.*

To deter gophers, and maybe groundhogs too, use sound spikes: solar- or battery-powered devices that beep every minute.

— KIM O'BRYAN, SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA

➤ **TO FIND MORE** suggestions for dealing with garden invasions, look up vendors and products, and order the book *Wild Neighbors: The Humane Approach to Living with Wildlife*, go to [humanesociety.org/gardennibblers](http://humanesociety.org/gardennibblers).

## Taboo Treatments

**Buyer beware.** Usually listed under "Pest Control" in the phone book, many wildlife control operators employ unscrupulous methods such as trap and removal, gassing, and drowning. Be vigilant when hiring a company to solve a wildlife problem: Ask for details about how the problem will be resolved, seek assurance in writing that the company complies with laws and regulations, and check with a local wildlife rehabilitator or humane society for references.

**Please pass on the mothballs.** Mothballs are not registered with the EPA for outdoor use as a wildlife deterrent. Besides most likely being ineffective, these white "candies" could be a danger to any children putting them in their mouths, and some people are sensitive to commonly used ingredients in mothballs and moth flakes.

**Back away from the ammonia.** One often-recommended deterrent is to place ammonia-soaked rags throughout the garden. But ammonia is not registered with the EPA for use as a wildlife deterrent, and it may harm the lungs of wild babies. (Household urine is off the hook; it's diluted enough to not be of concern.)