

# “Critter Control”: Protecting your plants from damage



# *Living in Harmony with Wildlife*

- For most of us, living with native plants and wildlife is part of why we joined Wild Ones!



# *Living in harmony with Wildlife...*

- A goal of planting natives is to attract wildlife, so what is the problem?
  - Some of our wild critters (and domestic ones) can be terribly destructive!
- Letting nature “just do what it does” is easier said than done if you value the time and money that you have invested in planting your natives.
- One friend who planted a 20 acre floodplain field with over a 1000 seedlings had almost a 98% failure rate, due to damage from deer and beaver.

# *Other problems with Wildlife*

- They can spread disease...both to humans and other animals:
  - Examples are Lyme disease, Distemper, Rabies, EPM
  - Carriers are deer, mice, skunks, bats, possums, raccoons
- They can kill other animals:
  - Coyotes will kill small dogs and young deer, raccoons and snakes will kill birds.
- They can spread invasive plants:
  - Garlic mustard is one example of an invasive plant spread by deer.

# The WORST problem critters?



# Deer:

- Most people love seeing deer...they ARE beautiful creatures. They can also be VERY destructive!
  - Severe browsing (usually in winter and spring) will damage or kill young trees.
  - Rubbing tree trunks by bucks can kill trees.
  - Deer love to eat many of our lovely native plants.
  - Huge groups of deer will trample and compact soil in some areas, destroying spring wildflowers.
  - They also carry disease and help spread invasive plants (Lyme disease, garlic mustard, for example).



# How to control deer?

- Hunting helps to reduce numbers.
- Fencing: is time consuming and expensive, but it works. It is most effective to fence each tree or shrub.
- Chemical sprays: can be very effective, but need to be repeated after rain, snow, or new growth.
  - Ropel, Deer Away, Liquid Fence, etc. are some name brands
  - Homemade recipe: Blend 2 eggs with 1cup of water and 2 TB hot sauce. Put in a gallon bottle and fill with tap water. Spray every two weeks.
- Other things that work: Soap (Irish Spring), dryer softener sheets, human hair, predator urine

# Plant species that deer don't like:

- Deer LOVE most soft-textured plants (such as arborvitae) but will also eat prickly rose bushes! Some favored wild flowers are Trillium and Shooting Star.
- Deer DISLIKE plants with a strong smell, such as lavender, bee balm, and other herbs. These could be planted as a barrier around other plants. Other natives that are less bothered are Black-eyed Susan, Columbine, and native Iris.
- Deer have NOT bothered my Button Bush, Arrowwood Viburnum, or Spicebush shrubs.



# Raccoons

- These are smart critters, who may look cute but can be very dangerous! They can bite (have very sharp teeth) and can carry fleas, rabies, and distemper. They will destroy bird nests and eggs.
- They will often dig up new plants, particularly those that have been fertilized with fish meal.
- Solutions:
  - Trapping or a .22 (Please DO NOT release trapped coons out in the country. We don't want any more than we already have!)
  - Ammonia soaked rags can provide a temporary solution, in addition to cayenne pepper or hot sauce. (Don't try garlic powder...they seem to like it!)

# Other less-of-a-problem critters...

- **Bats:**
  - Are beneficial....they can consume as many as 3000 insects in a single evening!
  - Bats rarely attack humans, however, they can contract rabies.
  - If you have a problem with a bat that you suspect has rabies, contact a licensed wildlife control person.
- **Beaver:**
  - Will be found near water, and can easily take down large trees.
  - They love to chew on smaller trees and branches.
  - You have two choices to deal with beaver: trapping or protect each tree with hardware cloth, metal screen, etc.

# Chipmunks

- Golly, these critters are cute! Why are they a problem?
- They LOVE to dig out plants...either out of your planting beds and/or pots.
- Best solution: sprinkle lots of cayenne pepper, hot sauce and/or garlic when you have new plantings.
- Get a cat.
- More labor intensive: wire cages

# Coyotes and Fox

- Are rarely a problem for plantings...in fact, can often be a help in controlling rabbits, mice, moles and voles.
- They mostly avoid humans...I rarely see one!
- Best deterrent: keep small pets inside or in a fenced area.
- Somewhat effective: sprays and other repellants
- Do NOT use poison bait!

# Opossums and Skunks

- A problem more for us humans (and dogs) than our plants.
  - Opossums will get into garbage, compost piles, and dropped bird seed.
  - Skunks like to eat grubs in your yard.
  - Both species carry diseases; rabies, distemper, and EPM.
- Control solutions:
  - Trapping or a .22
  - Again, please don't consider poison bait!

# Rabbits and Squirrels

- Rabbits are much more destructive to plants than Squirrels, although squirrels have been know to dig up new plants.
- Best control: fencing or wire cages
- Other solutions: chemical repellants and/or a dog.

# Resources

- Deer Proofing your Yard and Garden, by Rhonda Hart. Storey Publishing
- <http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/2351.htm>
- <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/wildlife/>
- [web.extension.illinois.edu/hkmw/downloads/40915.pdf](http://web.extension.illinois.edu/hkmw/downloads/40915.pdf)
- <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/state/newsdetail.cfm?NewsID=20637>
- [http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov//references/public/ND/deer\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov//references/public/ND/deer_fact_sheet.pdf)