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APHIS Factsheet

Wildlife Services

January 2002

Landscaping To Avoid Wildlife Conflicts

Wild animals contribute to our enjoyment of nature, and many species add aesthetic value to urban and suburban environments. Landscapes are frequently developed to be "environmentally friendly" by providing food and cover for songbirds, waterfowl, squirrels, and other wildlife. Wild animals can, however, damage property or threaten human health and safety. The presence of undesirable species or animal overpopulation often leads to many common wildlife problems associated with urban landscapes. Equipped with the right information, landscape designers can significantly reduce the potential for wildlife–human conflicts and their resulting impacts on economic interests and public safety.

What Attracts Wildlife

- Dense plantings of evergreen shrubs and trees, certain oak varieties, Bradford pear trees, and bamboo may encourage the formation of large roosts of flocking birds, such as blackbirds or starlings. Strong odor and property damage from accumulations of acidic bird feces, noise, and the potential for zoonotic diseases such as histoplasmosis are associated with bird roosts.
- Plantings of vegetation with dense foliage, such as conifers and magnolias, create attractive roosting habitats for noisy and messy birds.
- Inclusion of water courses or ponds (intermittent or permanent) in landscape design may attract a number of undesirable species. For example, aggressive Canada geese often take up residence in office parks, residential areas, golf courses, and other urban sites associated with water; the birds' droppings are unsightly and can be a human health hazard. Aquatic mammals, like muskrats and beavers, also aggressively seek wet habitats and are known to damage ornamental shrubs and trees, vegetation, turf, and structures with their feeding and burrowing activities.
- Short turf grass planted in association with water can attract geese and result in feeding damage to turf, fouling of walkways and recreation areas, and contamination of the water with droppings.
- The use of plants palatable to deer can result in extensive browsing damage to expensive landscaping, increased collisions between deer and automobiles, and elevated potential for Lyme disease, carried by ticks on the deer.
- Species of fruit-, berry-, nut-, and other food-producing plants attract wild animals and, therefore, can endanger public health and safety if placed near airports, electric power stations, and high-traffic areas.

How To Avoid Problems

Complex wildlife conflicts can be caused by specific species and site-specific ecological factors. Once problems develop, resolution can be costly and complicated by environmental laws. Many problems, however, can be avoided by careful planning and consultation with a qualified wildlife damage management professional during the early design stage of a landscape project. In addition to minimizing wildlife destruction to landscapes, cooperative planning can result in landscape designs that will attract songbirds and other nondestructive wildlife.

WS Can Help

The Wildlife Services (WS) program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) responds to requests for assistance from the public to help limit conflicts between wildlife and humans. A customer-service-oriented program, WS assists in preventing and solving problems created when wildlife cause damage to agricultural, urban, or natural resources. WS also assists when wildlife activity threatens human health and safety and endangered species. WS professionals provide biologically sound, effective, and responsible technical recommendations and direct control solutions to wildlife problems.

Additional Information

You may obtain additional information about WS from any State APHIS WS office. For the address and telephone number of the office in your area, call the WS Operational Support Staff at (301) 734–7921. You can also find information on WS programs by visiting the Web site at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ws.

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