Co-Existing with White-Tailed Deer

Increasingly humans and deer are learning to co-exist in Suburbia. Most people enjoy the sight of a deer and some people take great pleasure in watching the daily activities of deer. Yet others enjoyed the deer right up until a conflict arose. Human tolerances vary widely.

Why are deer so comfortable living in the suburbs?

Several factors have combined making our back yards quite appealing to wildlife. 1) As humans have spread out from the centers of bustling cities into suburbs, we have landscaped with a variety of plants, shrubs, and trees. In fact, these plants are richer in nutrition than plants found in wooded areas thus preferred. 2) In conjunction with very appealing plants, we have created nice wooded corridors for deer to move around with relative ease and protection. 3) Hunting is restricted in developed areas. 4) Large predators have been driven out of the suburbs. 5) Milder winters with less accumulated snow cover provide easy winter foraging. And perhaps most troublesome, 6) residents deliberately and continually feed deer and other wildlife.

When is too many too much?

Again, tolerances vary widely. Deer have been noticeably altering the natural environment for many years (at least since the mid 50's) yet the deer continue to thrive. From a biological standpoint an area of land can only support a given number of deer. Over time, it can be expected that the deer will populate beyond the capability of the land to support them and perish from disease and/or poor nutrition. However, in Suburbia, human tolerances are lower than biological thresholds. Meaning that the number of deer we can accept is significantly lower than what the land could potentially support. Concerns and conflicts have proportionately grown as deer and humans have continued to expand, merge, and co-exist.

Options?

- **Don't feed deer:** While it is seemingly benign and well intentioned it is terribly unhealthy for the animals and illegal. New York State recognized this fact when Chronic Wasting Disease began threatening our herds. Feeding artificially concentrates deer in one location where their waste builds up and potentially contaminates the food they are eating. It also encourages more deer to survive than the habitat can support causing over browsing in the surrounding area. Feeding also makes deer less fearful of people and human activities.
- **Landscape with deer-resistant plants:** A simple internet search will provide a selection of less tasty plants to deer.
- **Repellants:** Consider using repellants on highly prized plants.
- **Fencing:** Consider installing a fence in your back yard or around your gardens. Make sure to research what type of fences work best and the Town Codes. Typically, a fence is a deterrent from normal browsing behavior.
- **Dogs:** Dogs that are confined with an invisible fence are excellent deterrents of browsing deer.
- **Align with your neighbors:** It is much more effective if the majority of neighbors in a given community are making their yards less inviting to the deer.