

High Elevation Gardening 101 – Coping With Wildlife

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Gardening in Estes Park is a challenge, but the rewards can be worth the effort. One of the best pieces of advice I can give you is to **use local information**. This can save you a lot of headaches (and heartache), especially if you seek out information that is research-based and verified. The experts include Colorado State University Extension (extension.colostate.edu, or you can email questions directly to me at astoven@larimer.org), Master Gardeners (larimermg@gmail.com), local garden center staff, and your fellow gardeners. Check out PlantTalk Colorado (planttalk.org), the CO-Horts Blog (csuhort.blogspot.com), and Garden Notes (cmg.colostate.edu) for local and university-based information. The Estes Valley Community Garden has collected a variety of pertinent articles and information sheets. Click on the Resources tab at their website, evcg.org.

Coping with wildlife is a big challenge, as Estes Park is in the middle of a perfect wildlife habitat. There are some strategies that can help in managing landscape-wildlife conflicts.

- **Habit modification** - eliminate or modify what is attractive to wildlife. Don't feed wildlife (it's not legal anyway!) and reduce or eliminate shelter or hiding cover. This can help to make breeding difficult, which can reduce the number of critters that call your garden "home".
- **Exclusion** techniques, including fencing, netting and enclosing, make it difficult for animals to reach your tender plants and they may be discouraged from trying. This can be especially effective with deer.
- Use **aversion** devices, such as repellents, noise, motion or lights. Taste, odor, lights, motion-activated sprinklers, or "fake" predators (i.e., plastic owl or leaping coyote) are examples of ways that have been tested for effectiveness. Different species of animals may respond differently to these techniques, so you may have to try more than one, and you may need to move them occasionally to a new location or position them differently.
- **What doesn't work** for wildlife control? These items have been tested and found to be ineffective: Chewing gum, mothballs for rodents, ultrasonic repellents, human hair, and Irish Spring® soap.
- It is often recommended to use live traps to **capture and relocate** nuisance wildlife. In Larimer County it is legal for tree squirrels, rabbits and raccoons, and for other species with a permit, but always check with your local authorities first. It may be effective in the short-term, but it could increase the nuisance population, because if you remove one animal, another will move in. Safety is a big concern: aggressive, scared wildlife can bite, and there is danger in handling diseased or flea/tick infested animals. Also, think of your neighbors or those who are in your chosen relocation area – will the introduced animals create a problem for someone else?
- Lethal control methods such as kill traps, shooting or poisons bring their own problems and may be illegal or heavily regulated in certain areas. Carefully consider the negative effects before trying any of these methods.

Remember that wildlife were here first, and we are encroaching on their feeding areas. Modifying, excluding, and aversion techniques will go a long way to allow you to have a productive garden and to avoid the downside of more extreme approaches.

For more high elevation gardening tips, check out the CSU Extension Fact Sheet 7.248, "Vegetable Gardening in the Mountains." You can find it at extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/yard-garden, or just click on "Search the Site".

The Estes Valley Community Garden Board thanks Alison for her annual educational programs and materials. To learn more about Estes Valley Community Garden, visit evcg.org.