

Experts' tricks keep critters away

By Beth Burwinkel • Enquirer contributor • April 11, 2009

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Deer, rabbits, moles, voles and a variety of other animals and insects can cause problems for gardeners. We asked several local experts for advice on dealing with common garden critters.

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Deer

At Spring Grove Cemetery and Arboretum, employees spray a deer repellent on annuals. Employees check the fenced-in property weekly, horticulturist Whitney Huang says.

Boone County Arboretum Director Kristopher Stone says that her staff tries to plant deer resistant spring bulbs, such as daffodils, hyacinths and squill, to build deer fencing around trees.

A tree whose bark is rubbed by a deer can die early. Stone says. The wounded bark may heal, but the tree can be permanently weakened, Stone says.

When tree trunks grow to about four inches in diameter, deer stop rubbing them, Stone says.

Deer eat a variety of small plants.

"They just munch on everything we have," Stone says.

The arboretum sprays a commercial deer repellent on plants that lasts one to two weeks.

Rabbits

Stone suggests using commercial rabbit repellents, if rabbits are a problem. Marvin Duren of Marvin's Organic Gardens in Lebanon, says that dried blood scares rabbits

Moles and voles

Stone says that there are mole traps available as well as chemicals that can be used on voles. He cautions people to be careful about using chemicals around household pets to kill underground creatures.

If a homeowner sees a hole in the yard, that is a likely sign of a vole, says Marvin Duren. Moles raise the ground by moving back and forth. Both eat grubs, so control them and moles and voles will leave.

Now is a good time to treat Japanese beetle grubs, says Wes Duren of Marvin's Organic Gardens. Milky Spore, a bacteria, can be applied to the ground. Grubs consume it and die.

Additionally, a product called Shake Away, which is predator urine, can be applied over mole mounds, Wes Duren said.

"It plays on the moles' fear of predators," Wes Duren says.

By keeping the moles down, you will also reduce the number of voles, Wes Duren says, explaining that voles are lazy and use mole tunnels to eat plants and roots. He suggests stomping down any mole mounds in the landscape.

"To keep the voles out, you have to keep moles under control," he says.

Squirrels

Squirrels love tulip bulbs, Wes Duren says. He suggests protecting tulip bulbs from squirrels by putting chicken wire fencing on top of the tulip bed, under the mulch.

Slugs

Stone suggests placing a saucer of a lid upside down in the mulch and filling it with beer to keep slugs off plant leaves.

"The malt in the beer actually attracts the slugs," Stone says. They fall in it and drown.

Another treatment for slugs and snails is a powdery substance called diatomaceous earth, which is created from ocean bottom sediment, Marvin Duren says.

Other advice:

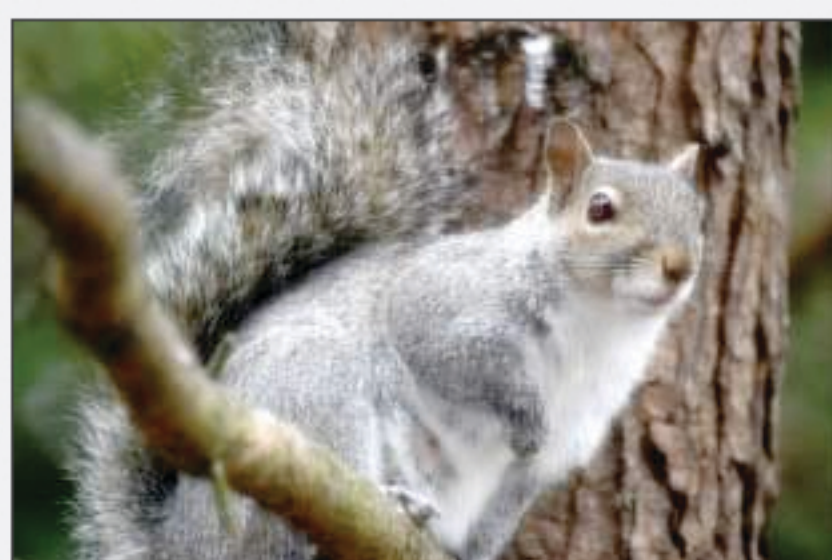
In general, a good way to fight pests is by

amending soil with compost, Wes Duren says.

"Healthy soils create healthy plants," he says. "Healthy plants fend for themselves."

To ward off insects, attract more birds with sunflower seeds, Marvin Duren says.

Marvin Duren, an organic gardener, says that frogs also come into his garden at night and eat the bugs that birds miss.



Zoom

Associated Press file

You can fence over tulip bulbs with chicken wire or netting to deter squirrels.

Caterpillars emerging

The forest tent caterpillar and eastern tent caterpillar are emerging now, says Kristopher Stone, director of Boone County Arboretum. They tend to eat foliage on trees. The forest tent caterpillar prefers maples, oaks and ash trees. The eastern tent caterpillar devours leaves on flowering trees.

Commercial sprays are available to fight either pest. Repeat the application every couple of weeks, Stone says. An organic option is a product called Bt, says Wes Duren of Marvin's Organic Gardens.