

## Critters in the Garden *by Ben Matus, BGRS Member*

Wild critters can be serious pests to those of us living in outlying areas. How to deal with them can be a real dilemma, especially if you really don't wish to dispatch them, but just get them to go somewhere else. For the most part, I've taken an organic approach that tends to attempt to make them my neighbor's problem instead of mine. ( I don't feel even a little bit guilty, 'cause my neighbors aren't doing the things in their yards, that Pauline and I are, so an occasional mole run or deer depredation goes unnoticed next door.)

Rabbits I try to trap with a home made rabbit trap my Dad made for me about 20 years ago. It's a plywood and hardware cloth contraption much like the Hav-a hart wire traps one sees marketed in the garden catalogues and rural outfitters such as Tractor Supply. A slice of apple and a bit of peanut butter is a fairly dependable bait. Once trapped, I relocate them a mile or two away. Rabbits don't have to be moved to far to stay gone. I've also caught cats, squirrels and ground hogs in my trap. Only the ground hog was on purpose. I took him about five miles down the road to a creek and turned him loose. Never saw another on that property. I also use repellents made by various companies with some degree of success. There are organic products available that repel by means of scent, taste and fear.

Stinky stuff, hot sauce and predator urine. *Liquid Fence Deer and Rabbit Repellent, Repels All* and *Shake Away* are the brands I use. The first two are liquids. My property is fairly large and we have a lot of plantings, so I buy concentrates when ever I can and mix them either in a hose-end sprayer or spray tank. The last is a granular product that you shake a bit on the ground at intervals much as a coyote or fox might mark his territory. A bit of water activates it and a scent humans can't smell remains for a few weeks. All need to be re-applied at regular intervals to maintain their effectiveness.

Moles and voles are a different problem. I've seen the mole traps on the market and they terrify me. I don't want to be fooling with a spring loaded killing machine. With my luck, I'd be looking at a visit to the ER the first and only time I tried to set one of those things. So, I try to make the moles my neighbor's issue. Chase 'em away. I use several different products in combination and in rotation. The first is *Mole Repellent* from the folks at *Liquid Fence*. I've found the *Liquid Fence* product to be difficult to keep in suspension in a tow behind sprayer and hard to draw into the spray of a hose-end sprayer at the recommended rate. I either increase the amount per gallon on my hose-end sprayer or if I'm feeling frugal I mix it in a two gallon pump up sprayer. If you do the latter, you'll find it goes a very long way and can be quite economical while remaining effective. This product works by covering the mole's food, worms and grubs, in a waxy disgusting coating causing them to look elsewhere to feed..

I also use [\*Mole Relief\*](#) from the folks at *Gardens Alive*, a mail order company selling only organics . As an aside, they also own *Michigan Bulb*, *Breck's* and a host of other catalogue gardening companies. It's my understanding they were high bidder on the sale of Jackson and Perkins / Parks Seeds but lost out due to their refusal to commit to keeping them in South Carolina. Dr. Keith Zary is now with them last I heard. *Mole Relief* is a granular product that I distribute using a hand held crank seeder. It



also needs to be activated with water and I find it lasts about three months. It acts by making the soil smell and taste bad to the moles thereby encouraging their departure. I've also used castor oil purchased from Gardener's Supply. It's applied with a hose-end sprayer and also makes the soil uncomfortable for moles and voles leading them to look for greener pastures. The absolute best results I've obtained was after I applied *Mole Relief* then a dose of castor oil followed by a good thorough rolling with my 48", water filled lawn roller. Don't know if they all left, defecated themselves to death or were squashed flat. In any case I had no moles in that area for very long time. One last point. Our friend, Dr. Kent Campbell always took great delight in saying that the next time he planted a rose, a good amount of coarse gravel was going into the fill mix. A trick he learned from Whit Wells, that unfortunately he never was able to test. However, in my research I found it noted that moles and voles seldom trouble areas of very heavy clay or considerable rockiness. Kent said that Whit has a large pile of gravel that he keeps specifically for the purpose of keeping the moles out of his rose beds. Do with it as you will.

Finally it's time to discuss deer. Far from being Bambi's poor mother, I regard deer as simply long legged rats. Vermin, pests, depredators. An unintended consequence of living in outlying areas and in many suburban neighborhoods. My reading says there are more deer on the North American continent now than there were when Columbus landed at Hispaniola. We humans have eliminated their natural predators or so nearly so that there is nothing left to control their populations. Thus, they ravage our gardens at will. They kill us on our roads. And we protect them. (*Tell us how you really feel, Ben...ed.*)



The only thing I've found to guarantee that deer won't eat your garden is a fence. A high fence. A ordinary six foot high privacy fence will ordinarily keep them out if they can't see through it at any point. They usually won't jump a fence where they can't see their landing place. They can leap any fence lower than eight feet. I've seen double five foot high chain link fences that work to keep them out. Laid out close to one another so the deer can't get a start at the second fence. Much like some of the double horse fence one sees occasionally. The eight foot high deer netting sold in catalogues work. I've a fence made of it. Surprisingly, it doesn't bother the birds or butterflies. It's a pain and can't be used just anywhere for practical and/or aesthetic reasons. But they work. The deer could walk right through that stuff but they don't. So if all else fails, put up a deer fence. It's available in most gardening catalogues and in many farm books. In one ag supply book, I found fiberglass whips to use as posts, in various lengths.

I don't want to fence all the plants I need to protect so I've resorted to repellents. The first I tried was *Plant Skyd*, a mixture of dried blood and other nasty things that repelled me more than the deer. It leaves a maroon residue on your plants that I found unsightly. I've since moved to the *Liquid Fence Deer and Rabbit Repellent* in combination with an ultra-sound noise maker. I spray the entire area. Soil, trees, plants, everything around and in the bed I'm trying to protect, as well as the perimeter for several feet outside the bed. Then I install a *Bird-X Yard-Gard* machine. The *Yard-Gard* is an electronic noise maker using a frequency above normal human hearing range. It can be battery operated or plugged into household current, if available. They are about seven inches long and high and about four inches deep. On batteries they're motion activated, on AC power they constantly emit an ultrasound screech. I know because I've had people around that can hear it. In combination with the *Liquid Fence* product, I've had good success. We grow tulips and hostas in a bed out near the road across from an alfalfa field that backs up to woods. For two years now, we've been successful in keeping the deer out of that bed. Cross your fingers. I use a couple of *Yard-Gards* in



the vegetable garden as well as the *Liquid Fence* and we also put *DeerVick*, a smelly, grease-like substance on the bean trellis and any other structure near our plants. It comes in a one pound jar with some cardboard tags you can hang from fences, trees, plants, whatever to help keep the deer away. Our luck hasn't been as good in the veggies as it has been elsewhere. We're still waiting for the green beans to get taller than four inches and recover from the ravaging they've taken from the deer, rabbits or both.

That concludes my treatise on rabbits, moles, voles and deer. I'd be happy to talk with you about any of it to share what I've learned and to learn you what you've found that works . Good luck, we'll need it.

*(Ed. Note: Ben presented this information at the June meeting of BGRS. Members of our society are fighting these creatures in our roses, vegetable gardens, and lawns. Several of us are now trying out some of these products in our own gardens).*