



What can jump ten feet in the air, eat a ton of vegetation a year, and is a recognized movie celebrity? It may sound like a science fiction creature, but it is, in fact, one of America's most common mammals – the deer. Although catching a glimpse of a deer along the roadside of a national park or while hiking in a wilderness area can be a highlight of a vacation, deer in your backyard may be a sight you've come to dread. But, with a better understanding of your “hoofed neighbors,” you may find you can coexist in peace.

### Deer in the Wild

The black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus columbarius*) has inhabited the Bay Area for thousands of years. This is the smallest and most abundant of California's mule deer and is found from the Oregon border south to Santa Barbara County. Bucks (adult males) measure about three feet at the shoulder and weigh between 110 and 250 pounds. Does (adult females) are smaller. Both bucks and

does sport a brown coat in the summer, and a gray coat in the winter. This particular subspecies has a distinctive “brush-like” black tail. Bucks lose and regrow their antlers every year. You cannot tell a buck's age by the number of points on each antler

The mule deer is named for its huge ears, which measure two-thirds the length of its head. It should come as no surprise to learn that a deer's most well-developed sense is its hearing along with a keen sense of smell. While deer are quick to detect motion, their vision is poor when identifying stationary objects. After sensing danger, a mule deer often flees by “stotting”— bounding with all four feet off the ground.

### Deer in Your Yard

Here in the Bay Area, deer once roamed freely in what are now backyards, shopping centers, and places of business. As subdivisions, malls, and industrial parks began to spring up, deer habitat shrank, resulting in decreases in available food and foraging areas. Deer began finding food in domestic gardens. Judging by their burgeoning population and robust health, they have adapted well to human invasion.

Deer generally enter your yard in search of a meal. On its way to eating a ton of vegetation a year, an average deer can select from more than 600 plants. Deer are primarily browsers, eating twigs, buds, and leaves of shrubs and trees. But they will also feed on grass, weeds, and other herbaceous plants. As you may have discovered, ornamental plants,

vegetable gardens, and fruit trees are the deer's favorite. When they are really hungry, however, deer will eat almost anything. It has even been reported that deer have stripped the wooden siding off houses to secure a mid-winter meal.

### What you can do

While a deer grazing in your yard may be a photogenic sight, you may be less than pleased with the scene it leaves behind. Half-eaten vegetables, denuded rose bushes, and severely pruned fruit trees are often the results of a deer visit. With a little patience and ingenuity, however, you may be able to discourage



or prevent deer from feasting at your expense. Listed below are a few suggestions that should help you.

- *Build a fence.*

This may be costly, but it is the only sure means of repelling deer. Deer can jump heights of over six feet, so your fence should be no lower than this. Thorny shrubs or a low hedge outside the fence will prevent deer from getting the running start they need for a good jump.

- *Landscape with deer resistant plants.*

Although deer may seem to munch randomly through your garden, there are certain types of plants they avoid. They are less likely to eat twiggy plants with tiny leaves, and usually pass by thorny, spiny plants (although roses are irresistible). Strong tasting plants with aromatic foliage are fairly safe, as are plants with milky sap. Other fairly safe bets include ferns, conifers, low ground cover, tiny rock garden plants, and poisonous plants. Remember, however, that a hungry deer eats according to its own likes and dislikes and may ignore this list.

- *Protect plants with netting or wire cages.*

Since most deer eat from shoulder height down, a five-foot wire cage surrounding small trees and shrubs may help to convince deer to browse elsewhere. A support structure (such as wire hoops) covered with nylon netting is sometimes effective in keeping deer out of vegetable gardens.

- *Purchase commercially available deer repellents.*

Several repellents are currently on the market, each with a varying degree of effectiveness (usually not over 50%). Check your local hardware store or garden shop for availability.

- *Use your imagination.*

Since any novel odor seems to repel deer to some extent, several creative techniques have been tried. Deodorant soap hung on trees and shrubs has helped repel deer and human hair placed in mesh bags has

## **Sharing the World Together.**

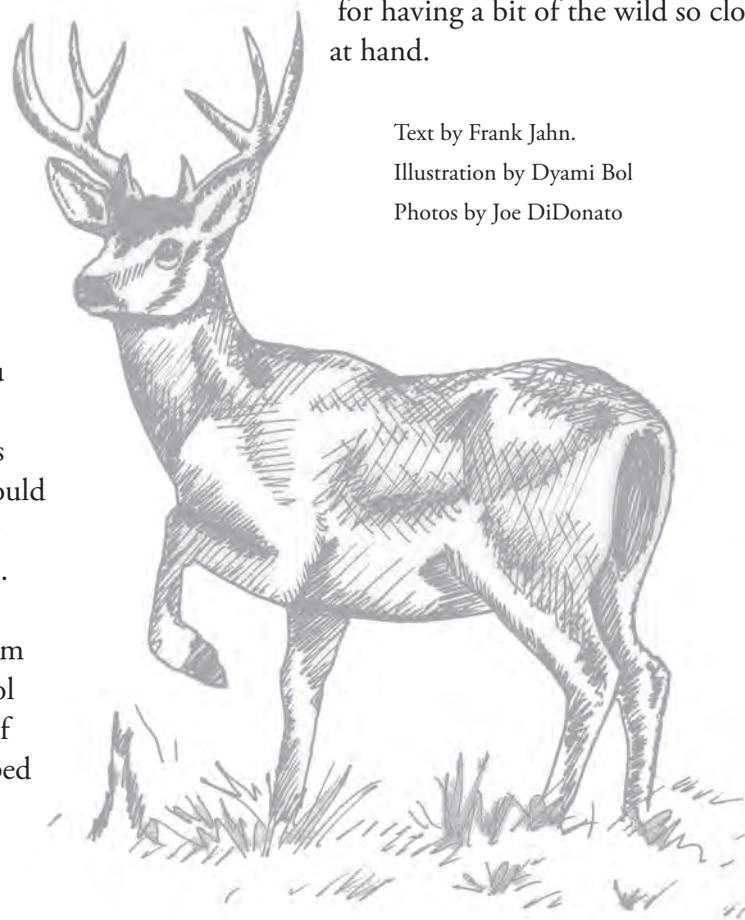
We are fortunate to have both open space and wild creatures so near us. With such a privilege, however, comes a responsibility — that of recognizing that deer have used these areas for thousands of years and we may need to compromise our intentions to minimize the conflicts of living in close proximity.

Although deer may be pesky at times, perhaps, this is a small price to pay for having a bit of the wild so close at hand.

Text by Frank Jahn.

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Photos by Joe DiDonato



been effective in some instances. This method works best where deer have a natural fear of human scents. You may want to do some experimenting of your own to find an effective repellent.

## **Trapping and Relocating Deer**

Should a deer become trapped in your yard or entangled in a fence, you should not try to free it on your own under any circumstances. A deer's legs are powerful and a well placed kick could severely injure or even kill you. Never approach a deer, even if it seems tame. Deer are unpredictable wild animals. Should a deer need to be removed from your property, call your animal control office or the California Department of Fish and Game for assistance. A trapped animal may panic in response to your approach so keep your distance until authorities arrive.

## Visitor Centers & Recreation Services

**ARDENWOOD HISTORIC FARM**  
Fremont 510-796-0199, [awvisit@ebparks.org](mailto:awvisit@ebparks.org)

**BLACK DIAMOND MINES**  
Antioch 925-757-2620, [bdvisit@ebparks.org](mailto:bdvisit@ebparks.org)

**COYOTE HILLS REGIONAL PARK**  
Fremont 510-795-9385, [chvisit@ebparks.org](mailto:chvisit@ebparks.org)

**CRAB COVE at CROWN BEACH**  
Alameda 510-521-6887, [ccove@ebparks.org](mailto:ccove@ebparks.org)

**SUNOL REGIONAL WILDERNESS**  
Sunol 925-862-2601, [svisit@ebparks.org](mailto:svisit@ebparks.org)

**TILDEN NATURE AREA/EEC and LITTLE FARM**  
Berkeley 510-525-2233, [tnarea@ebparks.org](mailto:tnarea@ebparks.org)

**AQUATICS UNIT**  
510-690-6620, [dmccormick@ebparks.org](mailto:dmccormick@ebparks.org)

**REGIONAL PARKS BOTANIC GARDEN**  
c/o Tilden Regional Park, Berkeley  
510-841-8732  
[bgarden@ebparks.org](mailto:bgarden@ebparks.org), [www.nativeplants.org](http://www.nativeplants.org)

**OUTDOOR RECREATION UNIT**  
District-wide programs 510-544-2512  
[recreation@ebparks.org](mailto:recreation@ebparks.org)

This brochure is provided as a public service of the Interpretive and Recreation Services Department of the East Bay Regional Park District.

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