

## Cache Valley residents plead for help with urban deer problem

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*By Brandon Hadley*

CACHE COUNTY — Anyone who has driven along the benches in Cache Valley lately may have noticed what seems to be a growing population of deer roaming the foothills and in some cases, even neighborhoods. This has people from Smithfield to Avon and every town around and between asking what can be done about the seemingly fearless deer.

Michelle Spuhler, of Providence, says she's had a problem with deer in her yard for as long as she can remember. "It's frustrating because they will eat anything I plant, everything from my roses to my tulips and even my potted plants.

"They are out there from dawn to dusk," said Spuhler. "You can look out any time and they're just grazing. They don't even get scared away if you walk outside."

Though many people are frustrated by the uninvited tenants inhabiting their neighborhoods, not everyone has a deep-seated animosity towards the free-roaming deer.

"The snow drives them out of the mountains in the winter and into our yards to forage. They've been doing this for hundreds of years," said Jake Dinsdale of Hyde Park. "People just need to understand that the deer are going to come down and eat, they're adapting just like we are. We're building higher and higher, pushing them up the mountain."

According to Cache County Animal Control, not too many complaints are made in regards to the free-roaming deer. "I think most people just sort of expect it," said animal control officer Danny Hulse. "People live in the hills and know there's going to be deer around."

"I would say 90 percent of our calls are in regards to domestic dogs," said Hulse. "We get quite a few calls about loose horses and cows but not too many complaints about the deer. The few deer calls we get tend to be about dogs chasing deer through the neighborhood or deer stuck in fences."

"I know this is where they live now," said Spuhler, "It's a tough thing to live with."

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People in rural neighborhoods aren't the only ones having problems with deer. According to the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, many farmers in Cache Valley have been having problems with deer and elk eating their crops.

"We've had a high number of reports from farmers in Cache Valley having problems with elk eating their crops in the past year," said Arlo Wing, landowner assistance specialist with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. Wing said agriculture damage is increasing even though

farmers haven't been reporting as many problems with deer this year. The main problem seems to be elk.

Some farmers have obtained a depredation permit to ease the burden of elk on their land. With each depredation permit given, one can shoot a deer or elk that's damaging their fields and property.

However, obtaining a depredation permit isn't as simple as making a phone call. According to Anis Aoude, of the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, a permit won't necessarily be granted with every request. "We'll usually come out and assess the damages," said Aoude. "Sometimes we'll just pay for the damages instead of issuing a permit to shoot an elk. We also only issue antlerless permits."

In order to qualify for a depredation permit, one must meet the Greenbelt status, which says that the applicant must own a minimum of five acres of land and use it for agricultural purposes. "Some people have the acres, but are turned down for the permit," said Wing. "It varies for each particular situation."

Even if someone qualifies and is granted a depredation permit it doesn't necessarily mean they will be able to use it.

"Each city differs what people can do with wildlife," said Wing, "some cities pass laws banning the use of dangerous weapons, sometimes even bows." Wing urges anyone who obtains a permit to check with their town and see if the law allows for them to use their permit.

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So what can one do to discourage deer from feeding on their landscaping? According to Wing, there are several steps people can take.

"People can plant plants that are native to Utah," said Wing. "There are some really pretty plants native to Utah that are fairly effective at minimizing damages."

Anyone with a deer problem who is looking to plant a garden should surround their crops with a fence at least seven and a half feet tall to keep the deer out. Wing suggests checking city ordinances to see if a fence of that height is allowed. Some cities have a six-foot limit on fences. "I would imagine most city councils would be open to a slightly larger fence if you went in and explained your situation," said Wing.

Certain chemicals can be used as an alternative to a fence to keep deer from eating gardens. "Some people swear by them, other people hate them," said Wing, "everyone's different."

Wing understands that not everyone hates having deer in their yards. "There's nothing wrong with wanting them in your yard," said Wing, "but we discourage people from feeding them by leaving things like hay out for them to eat."

Anyone wanting more information on ways to minimize the number of deer feeding in their yards should visit the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources website. A search for 'deer browsing' or 'creating landscapes' will take you to a page with many helpful tips and suggestions.

Anyone wanting to know more about depredation permits should contact the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.