



(Forest Wildlife "What can you feed wild deer" June 28, 2021 Nicky Featherstone)

When homeowners start leaving snacks out in their yard for deer, there can be several unintended consequences. For example:

1. IT CAN SPREAD DISEASE

Leaving food out for deer could result in groups of deer gathering in your yard. When deer congregate in higher densities than usual, you create a higher risk of the deer spreading harmful diseases to each other.

Chronic Wasting Disease, for instance, is a contagious and fatal illness that spreads easily among deer in close proximity.

2. IT CAUSES UNNECESSARY COMPETITION

Large groups of deer who are looking for an easy source of food are likely to compete over it due to their natural social hierarchy. The deer that come out on top are the stronger ones who don't need the extra food to begin with.

3. IT CAN MAKE THEM BEHAVE UNNATURALLY

Although it can be rewarding to get wild deer to trust you by feeding them, it's bad for their safety. Deer are naturally scared of humans – as they should be.

When you take away the instinctual fear, deer might get too comfortable in residential areas.

This increases the risk of deer-related car accidents, damage to landscapes, disruption of other wildlife habits, and even aggression towards humans.

4. IT CONTRIBUTES TO OVERPOPULATION

As harsh as it may seem, nature weeds out the weaker animals and controls the deer population on its own. When humans interfere by feeding them, more deer survive than their habitats can accommodate.

The bottom line is if you're serious about helping your deer visitors stay healthy, do it responsibly. Take special care not to interfere with the deer's natural habits. And remember that once you start feeding them, they will depend on you to make it through the winter.

Best practices: Don't feed the deer. If you must feed the deer, know what they can eat – help our deer stay healthy! See following pages for foods good for deer and foods bad for deer. If you want to feed the deer, be educated what they can eat.

Having specialized stomachs and requiring high nutrition, they select easily digestible foods. Deer are also known as 'concentrate grazers.' Examples of [food deer eat](#) are:

- Soybeans –are very rich in nutrients and contain up to 40% protein crucial in the diets of deer.
- Grass –comprise less than 10% of a deers diet. It also contains protein. Tough in low amounts.
- Chestnuts –are high in protein and carbohydrates. They are also low in tannins that inhibit digestion.
- Mushrooms –are high in phosphorous and proteins that aid in the growth and development of deer muscles.
- Forbs –are highly digestible and are a rich source of energy, vitamins, and antioxidants.
- Beechnuts –are high in proteins and fats crucial for energy and maintaining body mass in deers.
- Twigs
- Alfalfa –contain protein in small amounts and provide a good supplement for the nutrition of deer.
- Apples and peaches –are palatable for deer and are high in fiber that aid in the digestion of other foods.
- Acorns –are rich in protein, carbohydrates, fats, and minerals such as potassium, phosphorous, and calcium. They also contain vitamin C, all of which play a big part I the survival of deer.
- Bark –cedar elm, four-wing, and saltbush
- Shoots
- Pecans –are fed on commonly during winter and are high in fat, providing sufficient energy to carry the deer throughout the winter season.
- Hickory –aren't very effective to the diets of deer but are fed on as deer find them tasty.
- Persimmons –are also known as deer candy due to their appealing taste and are high in nutrients; starch, vitamin C, potassium, iron, phosphorous, iron, and carbohydrates.
- Foliage
- Wild crabapple –though bitter, they contain tannins and have a high nutrition value as well.
- Clover leaves –are a preferred source of food during the winter season, especially the red clovers, which are high in nutrients crucial to the deer diet.
- Old Man's Beard –grey lichen, typically found growing on dead spruce and balsam trees high in nutrients and essential in deers diet.
- Weeds –dandelions, ragweed, and asters
- Trees –willow, oak and, red cedar are fed on, especially in the winter season. They act as good supplements for deer feed.
- Oat –are easily digestible and are rich in crude protein to aid in muscle development in deer.
- Staghorn sumac (a plant) –provides a sufficient amount of nutrients during the winter season. Deer feed on their fruits to supplement their diets.

Some of the food substances you should **avoid feeding deer** include:

- Potatoes –are deer-resistant plants, and therefore deer will avoid eating them.
- Kitchen scraps –These are carrot pulp, fruit peeling, or herb stems. Deer lack the bacteria required to digest these foods. They will die of hunger.
- Hay –during winter, deers are in browsing mode; hence they lack the correct bacteria in their digestive tracts to digest hay. Ultimately, this will lead them to die of starvation regardless of feeding on the hay.
- Grapes and raisins –have high sugar contents that may prove harmful to deer during the winter season.
- Wild mushrooms –are poisonous to deer and may be deadly to the animals if ingested.
- Corn –due to its capability to ferment quickly, corn may cause problems to the digestive system of deers.
- Tomatoes –are part of the nightshade family, many of which can be poisonous to deer.
- Tomato leaves- apart from the fruits, the fruit of the tomato plants are also toxic to these hoofed animals.
- Rhubarbs –These plants are a part of the nightshade family. They contain oxalic acids. When ingested in large amounts, they cause gastrointestinal problems, kidney stones, and even kidney failure.
- Eggplants –are a part of the nightshade family, which are toxic to deer and other ruminants.
- Cucumbers –may seem healthy but are also among the nightshade family that harms deers.
- Rosemary –contains volatile oils, which cause stomach upsets and even depression in these ruminants.
- Onions –are members of the allium family, which results in complications such as anemia to deers.
- Chives – are part of the allium family. They cause the blood cells of the ruminants to rupture, in the long run, leading to anemia,
- Carrots –are edible, yes, but only the tip and the stem. Roots of carrots can prove harmful if eaten.
- Garlic –causes anemia in deers of all species.

