



PLEASE DON'T FEED THE DEER!

The deer population at one time had natural predators: coyote, mountain lions, and screw worm. The automobile, human hunters, and the loss of natural habitat have become the controlling factors for deer population today. Many areas in Texas have deer populations as much as ten times more than the natural vegetation will support. Overgrazing reduces habitat for songbirds and other wildlife and reduces the diversity of native plant species.

The feeding of corn to deer is a big part of the overpopulation problem. Deer need a 12 to 16% protein diet and corn is about 10 percent protein, and has high carbohydrate content. It is like feeding the deer a candy diet! Deer actually can become malnourished as a result of eating corn. Deer hunters should use corn as a bait only and only in hunting season.

Other concerns associated with the artificial feeding of deer include:

Aflatoxin Mold Contamination – Corn with more than 60 parts per billion (ppb) Aflatoxin cannot be sold for human consumption, so it often goes to animal feed sources. This invisible mold can increase with improper storage and excess humidity. Birds can be harmed by Aflatoxin levels of 20 ppb and above, and they often feed at deer stations too. Aflatoxin is especially toxic to wild turkeys.

Liver Damage – In suburban areas where corn makes up a large portion of a deer's diet, the deer are suffering from liver disease. The very young and very old are especially susceptible to liver damage. Their overall immune system is affected as a result.

Acidosis - Deer do not normally have the bacteria necessary to digest corn in their intestinal tracts and too much corn can result in acidosis. Acidosis makes them unable to digest even their normal native plant forage. They will keep eating the corn even though it is making them ill. They can literally starve with full stomachs.

Losing Fear of Humans – As deer become dependant on corn feeding, they will lose their natural fear of humans and overgraze in the areas adjacent to the feeders. They become more of a problem with cars and can cause damage to homes and pets. They are wild animals and should have a fear of humans. Their survival may depend on it!

Feeding on the Ground – Placing deer food directly on the ground may lead to parasite infestation as the deer ingest soil along with the corn.

Concentration of Deer Population – The presence of a consistent artificial food source leads to higher populations that can lead to stress. Close contact at feeder stations can put deer at risk for increased disease transmission. A variety of behavioral and social changes can result from the unnatural concentration of the population. Deer will stay near a sure food source, even if it is an unhealthy one, rather than seek a new food source. The overgrazing of native plants in the overpopulated area leads to decline of both native plant and animal species.

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Disruption of Normal Feeding Patterns – Artificial feeding keeps the deer from normal seasonal movement patterns to winter and summer feeding grounds. Deer will typically move 4 to 5 miles to different habitat for winter. Deer will migrate from their sleeping areas to the corn feeders and back so that they have a much reduced forage pattern. The landscapes of homeowners on the way to the feeding stations will be browsed to the point of death to the plants. Some deer will end up eating the majority of the corn provided so that the youngest and weakest deer may not get adequate nutrition. Since the herd feeds in groups, the rest of the herd may not want to forage for additional food.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) – Much of the corn used for animal food is genetically modified so purchasing this to feed deer supports this “Frankenfood” industry.

Overpopulation in Herds – When adequate native forage is not present, does will not become pregnant or may have miscarriages. With the artificial supplement of corn, deer will consistently have twins or even triplets. Fawns will sometimes become pregnant in their first winter when they have the artificial food supplements. A herd population may easily double in one year.

The use of native plants in the landscape will provide natural forage for deer. Once established, native plants can withstand the normal browsing of a normal number of deer. It is a misconception that deer feed on grass. Grasses are less than ten percent of a normal diet for deer. Deer appreciate a consistent source of water and can find adequate browse in most areas of the Hill Country, even in winter. If you must provide them with something, give them a mineral supplement block and a water source. Be aware that you are drawing the deer into your neighborhood by doing so.

Many municipal areas and all of the state parks in Texas have penalties in place for the feeding of deer. More and more cities are considering enacting such laws. If you have neighbors who are still feeding corn to deer, please educate them about the harm they are doing. Compare the small, weak-looking deer in most suburban Austin areas with truly wild deer. We are killing them with kindness! Get involved in enacting a no-feeding ordinance in your neighborhood. The health of the deer and our native plants may depend on it!

Resources:

Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State
Montana State University Education Services
Texas Parks and Wildlife Biology Department
Wildlife Rescue Austin

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