

# Anti-Deer fences— why some work & some don't

The only 100% deer barrier is an 8 ft tall woven wire fence or solid wall—expensive and permanent.

An alternative is electrified fences. They rely upon a painful shock to persuade deer to neither jump nor penetrate a fence.

Because they aren't physical barriers, electric deer fences rely upon key deer behavior aspects.

## 1. Deer, like us, are creatures of habit.

Where they choose to feed, rub, walk and breed are habits learned over time—a habit reinforced every time they do it safely.

Suddenly fencing a deer herd away from an area forces the herd to break a habit. That is why the first days of denial of use (by a fence) is critical if the fence is to succeed.

Once a herd's pattern is broken, the change in feeding/walking location is easier to maintain.

## 2. Deer make risk-benefit decisions about feeding sites, trails and rubbing trees.

Electric fences use pain to raise the cost (the degree of risk and effort to use an area) and persuade deer that it is safer and less frightening to feed, rub or trail elsewhere. When they are desperate they may risk the pain—which is why you can't keep out starving deer with electric fencing if the site is their only food source.

## 3. Electric fences work when deer have time to make a decision to avoid them.

That's why it's important to identify deer trails entering a new exclusion area and interrupt them with something physical (e.g. a brush pile) where the trail approaches the fence. Do this when the fence is installed.

Why? The trail change makes them tentative. This makes them move cautiously.

## 4. Don't hunt near the fence.

Why not? Because frightened deer don't make normal decisions. As prey animals they are easily spooked into leaping over or through fences. Once deer learn that they can jump the fence without

pain, they're more likely to do so when not frightened, a habit that's costly to break.

## 5. Fence a small area first.

Why? The intent is to first change the herd's habits. Install a new fence around a small area first. The local deer herd will encounter it, learn to avoid it and instead feed or rub in adjacent areas.

Leave it in place for 2 weeks. Progressively expand the enclosed area until 100% is protected.

## 6. Deer interpret a fence in their own terms.

Their world is black, white and shades of gray. Therefore, *barriers that contrast with their view of the world* are the most visible to deer—and likely to get their attention.

## 7. Use scent caps to train the local deer herd.

- **What are scent caps?** Metal pop bottle caps attached to the fence that are baited with apple scent to attract deer. It's a Premier invention that's been copied by others.
- **How do they work?** Experience has shown that apple scent caps encourage deer to have an initial painful interaction with a new electric fence. The scent entices deer to touch the caps. The deer receive a shock through their noses. (Peanut butter also works but it's not as easy to apply.)
- **How many caps?** One every 50 ft in heavy traffic areas (or 100 ft in low traffic areas).
- **Is it hard to rebait scent caps?** Baiting involves turning off the energizer; walking or riding along the fenceline; twisting the cap upward, squeezing a few drops of apple scent onto the cotton inside the cap; and twisting the cap downward.

## 8. It's been our experience that deer fences that disappoint are:

- Installed at the wrong time (after habits have developed).
- Managed without adequate understand of how a deer herd interacts with fences.

