

Living with **White-tailed Deer**

General information

White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) management in Florida is a conservation success story. In the 1930s, the deer population was dangerously low in much of Florida due to unregulated overharvest. Thanks to science-based wildlife and habitat management funded in whole or in part by the Wildlife Restoration Program, today deer are found throughout Florida. White-tailed deer are the most popular game species in Florida. They are also appreciated by hikers, wildlife photographers and other outdoor enthusiasts.



White-tailed deer have a characteristic tail, which is brown on top and white below. When a deer is alarmed, it raises its tail and waves it back and forth like a white flag, signaling a warning to other deer. Throughout most of the year males (bucks) are easily distinguished from females (does). Bucks have antlers, and they grow a new set every year. Does do not have antlers. In most parts of Florida, antler growth begins in the spring and antlers are shed in late winter or early spring after the conclusion of breeding season.



Fawns protect themselves from predators by hiding in vegetation. During a fawn's first few weeks of life they have minimal scent. The doe limits contact with her young, except to nurse, so her scent will not attract predators to the fawn's hiding place. It is important to avoid contact with fawns. If you approach a fawn and it does not flee, please leave it alone. The doe is usually nearby.

Deer are most active at dawn and dusk and often can be seen along roadsides at these times. They prefer habitats with young, low-growing vegetation and areas where two different habitats intersect, allowing them to feed and avoid predators. Deer are primarily browsers, feeding on the leaves, shoots, flowers and fruits of trees, shrubs and grasses. They may eat and damage landscaping or agricultural crops. Deer are generally fearful of people and avoid contact, but like any wild animal, a deer may defend itself if threatened.

What can be done to prevent conflicts with deer?

- Do not feed deer in urban areas. If deer are attracted to human-provided food sources such as bird or other wildlife feeders, remove or protect the food source. Deer may seem friendly, but wildlife can be unpredictable and can become aggressive toward people or pets.
- [Landscape with plants and vegetation that are less attractive to deer.](#)
- Install [off-set, slanted electric or high fence](#) around gardens or edible plants or crops.
- Use a motion activated sprinkler near edible landscaping to scare deer away.
- Gas exploders or pyrotechnics that activate at regular intervals can be used to scare deer away where feasible. Deer may get used to these scare tactics over time.



- Dogs may keep deer away from small areas such as fenced yards or gardens.
- [Deer repellents](#) can reduce but not eliminate damage to plants. They are best suited for orchards, small gardens and ornamental plants and can be applied directly to the plants.

Legal status and options

White-tailed deer are a native game mammal with established hunting seasons in Florida. Hunting regulations and season dates can be found on the FWC website at: MyFWC.com/hunting.

Aside from hunting deer during established seasons, deer cannot legally be taken as nuisance wildlife without either a [Gun and Light at Night Permit](#) or a [Deer Depredation Permit](#) from the FWC. A [Gun and Light at Night Permit](#) authorizes harassment (scaring) of deer causing damage to crops with a gun and

light at night. Deer Depredation Permits authorize the lethal take of deer that are causing property damage where less lethal means of control are either ineffective or not feasible. These permits are designed for landowners or authorized lease holders of a property with agricultural rights. For information about these permits and how to apply, contact the appropriate [FWC Regional Office](#) or visit [our website](#).

How you can help

Report sick, abnormally thin, or dead deer to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) hotline at (866) CWD-WATCH (293-9282). [CWD](#), which has NOT been detected in Florida, damages the brains of affected deer, elk, moose, caribou and other members of the deer family and causes them to die. The FWC has an ongoing monitoring program to confirm Florida remains free of CWD.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Regional Offices

Regional Offices

Northwest Region

3911 Highway 2321
Panama City, FL 32409-1659
850-265-3676

North Central Region

3377 East U.S. Highway 90
Lake City, FL 32055-8795
386-758-0525

Northeast Region

1239 S.W. 10th Street
Ocala, FL 3441-0323
352-732-1225

Southwest Region

3900 Drane Field Road
Lakeland, FL 33811-1299
863-648-3200

South Region

8535 Northlake Boulevard
West Palm Beach, FL 33412
561-625-5122

