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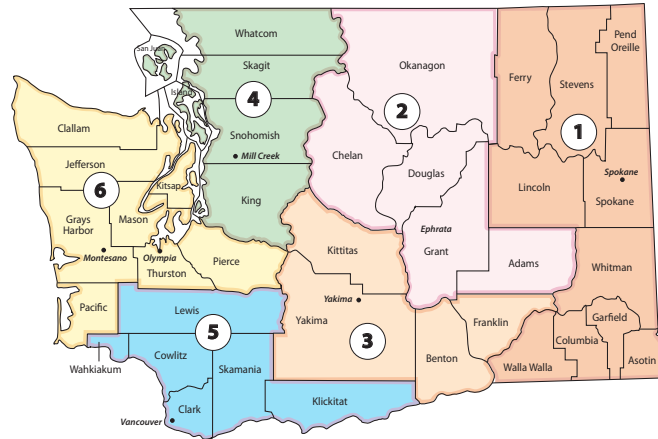
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For more information on
feeding wildlife, see WDFW's website at

wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/living/wildlife-feeding

The items in this publication are subject to change.
Please contact your local WDFW representative
for the most current version.



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To request this information in an alternative format,
please call 360-902-2349 or 360-902-2207 (TDD), or submit
a request through the WDFW website at:

wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation

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Feeding Deer in Urban and Suburban Areas... Is it Harmful?



Washington
Department of
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Impacts of feeding deer in urban and suburban areas

Many well-meaning Washington residents in urban and suburban areas enjoy feeding deer in their yards, especially during winter months. Although some people see this type of feeding as helping these animals, it actually can hurt them and potentially cause illness and death for the animal.

Wildlife adapt to survive winter months without our help

Many people believe that deer lack good natural food sources during winter and therefore need supplemental food to survive. However, these animals have remarkable abilities to survive winter conditions without human help, including:

- Growing insulating guard hairs and underfur
- Storing fat
- Changing their diet to fibrous, woody browse
- Migrating to areas with less snow and better feed
- Lowering their metabolic rates
- Conserving energy by restricting movements during severe weather

**Keep deer wild –
backyard feeding does
more harm than good.**

Feeding urban and suburban deer can be harmful

Feeding wildlife can cause serious health issues for the animals and negatively affect you and your neighbors. WDFW discourages feeding deer in urban and suburban areas for several reasons:

- Deer digestive systems are well adapted to handle natural forage. Although these animals will eat feed that humans provide, carbohydrate-rich foods like fruit, grains, and corn aren't normally part of their natural diet, especially during winter, and can cause serious health problems.
- The high amount of sugars in fruit, grain, and corn rapidly ferments in the stomach, causing an over-production of acid and damage to the stomach lining. Acid and bacterial toxins can then leak into the bloodstream, causing a painful death.
- Feeding urban and suburban deer can increase negative human-wildlife interactions and result in unintended consequences for the animal and your community. Specific examples include: increased risk of vehicle collisions; increased aggression towards pets and people; increased risk of disease transmission; increased dependency on humans for food and a loss of normal, wild behavior; increased negative impacts to wildlife diversity and abundance; and increased damage to fences, gardens, and ornamental plants and trees.



Photo credit: Greg Green

- Supplemental feeding may attract carnivores, such as bears, cougars, and coyotes that may prey upon wild animals using a feed site or nearby pets or farm animals. Encounters between humans and large carnivores are typically rare, but feeding deer creates the potential for unnecessary and avoidable conflict between humans and predators. This may cause a dangerous situation for people and result in an animal being euthanized.

Though WDFW may conduct large-scale elk feeding programs in certain areas, primarily in winter, these are only done under very specific conditions. For more information on these programs or to discuss feeding in general, please contact your local District Wildlife Biologist or Wildlife Conflict Specialist.