

Cohabiting with Resident Canada Geese

This is a short version of a much more comprehensive discussion that I will complete later in the Fall. That will be available on the town website.

If you are having trouble with Canada Geese lounging, eating and “fertilizing” your lawn or spending the night on your wharf, it is because you have created an environment that is very attractive to them.

Resident (by that I mean not migratory) geese arrive in the spring and seek quiet secluded areas to nest and hatch their goslings. Following the hatch, the adults molt so that they are unable to fly. Unmated geese also molt but slightly later. After molting and while raising young, geese seek areas with ready access to water, safe places to lounge and ample food supplies. Unfortunately a fertilized, freshly mown lawn with a few trees for shade but not enough to provide cover for predators, and easy walking access to water for protection is absolutely perfect goose habitat. It may help to stop fertilizing the grass and to let it grow to 4-5 inches. It is the tender young grasses, that the geese really love. Planting additional trees and placing a few rocks that could shield predators may also make your yard less attractive. Coyotes and foxes really are your friends here. Remember that the young geese will return to the place where they learn to fly. 6 geese this year may turn into a significant flock a few years down the road. There are hunting seasons which may be helpful in some areas where hunting is an option. It is also possible to get a permit to “addle” eggs on the nest which can cut down productivity.

Canada geese are protected by a Migratory Bird Treaty so you are not allowed to have any physical contact with them but there are ways to make your property less attractive. A combination of techniques may be necessary to successfully discourage these birds from congregating in undesirable locations. The following list gives some options:

1. Absolutely DO NOT FEED THEM!!!! Not only does that guarantee that they will stay, but non natural food like bread, corn and even poultry food is not good for them and may even be

harmful.

2. Scare tactics like mylar tape or models of predators, might work for a little while but geese are very intelligent and will get used to most options and then ignore them. You can move them around every day or two and try them in combinations but realistically, they don't work long
3. Harassment may help but it needs to be consistent. Noise and chasing them can make them less comfortable. Specially trained dogs can be effective.
4. Modify the shore front with a buffer. This is the most effective long term solution if you wish to maintain some lawn. The key is that the geese not be able to see the grassy lawn area from the water. The buffer should be constructed of native shrubbery and trees, be at least 25 feet deep and have a curving path to the water front. The thicker the growth, the better but it doesn't need to be very high. It is also possible to include a 2-3 foot fence and a gated path within the buffer. High bush blueberries are wonderful but probably shouldn't be closest to the shore because some geese like them. Of course a buffer on the shore isn't going to be much help if your neighbor mows to the water line and feeds the geese. At some point this has to be a community effort.
5. By far the easiest option is to let the lawn go and let the shore cover grow back all by itself. If the soil is not disturbed, the potential for invasive plants to get a foothold is lessened but in this area, it is best to keep an eye out for honeysuckle and bittersweet especially.

Note that these last two options are not only good for discouraging geese but are the best thing you can do for the water quality in your lakes and streams!

Good Luck!

Anne Huntington