



GARDENING IN DEER COUNTRY



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Special thanks to Linda Querec.



Got Deer?

Watching a doe with her fawn wandering through the yard can be a pleasing and relaxing experience and a way to feel one with nature...that is, until you realize that their target is your favorite hydrangea or those pansies that you spent a couple of hours planting yesterday. Then the battle begins. Trying to keep deer from eating your landscape is like trying to keep squirrels off your bird feeders – often a full-time job. There are things that you can do to discourage marauding deer from constantly using your yard as their feeding ground. The key is to make your yard less enticing than your neighbor's.

In a battle of wits, it's always good to know as much as you can about your opponent. Learning about deer behavior, feeding habits, where they hang out, and their likes and dislikes can help you develop strategies to discourage them from making your yard their favorite buffet.



Deer Facts

White-tailed deer are athletic, leaping as high as 9 feet from a standing position; jumping a span of 20 feet from a run; and running at a 35 mile-per-hour clip. That's faster than the speed limit on Pinehurst's residential streets! A deer's sense of smell is better than that of most dogs and their hearing is far superior to ours. The placement of their eyes allows them to scan a 310° range. Deer prefer woodland edges and are territorial, in that they have a home range, usually about one square mile. Once they establish deer tracks or paths, they continue to use those tracks and other deer will follow. You don't want the deer track to lead into your garden.

Eating Habits

Deer are browsers and grazers, stopping at one plant for a few minutes, taking a little off the top and sides and then moving on to the next. A deer can fill its stomach in an hour or two and then find a quiet spot to rest and digest its food. They raid the same gardens repeatedly and always know where the near-by cover is located. Deer are active during the day but browsing for food occurs mostly around dawn and dusk. Deer damage is usually seasonal. A prime feeding season is early spring with abundant new growth in the garden and a time when the deer herd expands to include nursing does with new fawns and yearlings pushed away by the mother. Late summer and early fall are also prime seasons when deer feed heavily in order to store fat for the winter. The size of a deer herd will vary. A good supply of acorns in the fall will help the herd survive the winter. Does that remain healthy through the winter can produce twins and even triplets, increasing the size of the herd.



Recognizing Deer Damage

Deer don't have sharp teeth nor do they have upper incisors so they bite a branch and pull, either stripping off the foliage, snapping off the branch, or uprooting the plant. Branches gnawed by deer have a ragged tip in contrast to a sharply cut one found on a branch eaten by a rabbit or other wildlife.

Design Tips for Deerscaping



It's best to prevent damage before it begins. There are a number of ways to make your garden less appealing to deer including using deer-resistant plants and by developing a landscape plan that uses deer behavior to your advantage.

Choosing Plants

Keep in mind that no plant is truly deer resistant. Some are just less appealing than others. What is called a “deer-resistant plant” can also be called a “plant that deer will eat less often.” And, like humans, deer can have personal preferences. Their tastes can be seasonal, depending on what is available and their nutritional needs at that time. A hungry deer will eat anything...a stomach full of food of minimal nutritional value feels better than an empty one. Deer prefer tender new growth and buds. They dislike bitter tasting, thorny, hairy and prickly foliage.

Plants can be categorized as frequently damaged, occasionally damaged or seldom damaged. There are also a few plants that are considered deer-repellent, although they are not typically used in large quantities for landscaping. Plants are categorized by susceptibility to deer damage as shown in the list that follows. Those shown in **bold** type are particularly deer-resistant and those marked with an asterisk are native to the Southeast.



Trees

Frequent: Redbud*, Atlantic White Cedar*, Fringe, Crabapple, various fruit trees

Occasional: Japanese Maple, Red Maple*, Dogwood*, Kousa Dogwood, Foster's*/Savannah*/Nellie Stevens Holly, Saucer Magnolia, Bradford Pear, Oaks*, Willows.

Seldom: Red Buckeye*, Deodora Cedar, Hawthorn*, **Honey Locust***, **American Holly***, **Crepe Myrtle**, **Southern Magnolia***, **Sweetbay Magnolia***, **Pines***, **Live Oak***, **Chastetree**



Evergreen Shrubs

Frequent: Japanese Euonymous, Fatsia, Aucuba, Indian Hawthorn, Azalea, Arborvitae

Occasional: Camellias, Rose of Sharon, Japanese Holly, Mahonia, Viburnum

Seldom: Abelia, **Winterberry, Barberry**, Japanese Boxwood, Summer-sweet Pepperbush*, **Eleagnus**, Gardenia, Chinese Holly, **Yaupon**, Loropetalum, Banana Shrub, **Wax Myrtle**, Nandina, **Rosemary**



Deciduous Shrubs

Frequent: Burning Bush, Roses, Blueberries*

Occasional: Flowering Quince, Smokebush, Forsythia, Virginia Sweetspire*, Viburnum Weigela

Seldom: Japanese **Barberry**, **Butterfly Bush**, Sweetshrub*, **Blue Mist Shrub**, Winter Jasmine



Perennials

Frequent : Daylilies, Hostas

Occasional : Shasta Daisy, Hardy Ice Plant, Gerbera Daisy, Iris, Sedum, Stokes Aster*, Verbena*

Seldom: **Yarrow**, Blue Star*, Columbine, **'Powis Castle' Artemisia**, Butterflyweed*, **False Indigo***, **Angel's Trumpet**, Coreopsis*, Gaura*, **Lenten Rose**, **Lantana**, **Russian Sage**, **Mexican Bush Sage**, **Lamb's Ear**



Annuals

Frequent: Celosia, Impatiens, Sweet Potato, Johnny Jump Ups, Pansies

Occasional: Flowering Kale, Sunflowers, Moss Rose, Purslane, Mexican Sunflower

Seldom: Ageratum, Snapdragons, Ornamental Peppers, Cleome, Coleus, Cosmos, Melampodium, Pentas, Marigold, Vinca, Dusty Miller, Zinnias, Petunias



Vines & Ground Covers

Frequent : Clematis, Wintercreeper, English Ivy

Occasional: Trumpet Vine*, Clumping Liriope, Lady Banks Rose, Japanese Wisteria

Seldom: Ajuga, Cross Vine*, Climbing Fig, Carolina Jasmine, Coral Honey-suckle*, Mondo Grass, Junipers, Star Jasmine, Confederate Jasmine



Safe bets for any yard include ornamental grasses, ferns, and palms that can withstand the Sandhills winter temperatures. Many herbs are resistant and often offer repellent properties.

Bad Choices include spring bulbs with the exception of daffodils.

Garden Layout

While plant selection is important, it's not the only way to deter deer. You can use your new found knowledge of deer behavior, habits and preferences to design a garden that they will find uninviting. The most important thing is to make your yard unappealing to them so they will not enter in the first place and will keep moving down the block. Here are some garden design tips to make your yard uninviting.

1. Although deer have great leaping ability, they don't like to jump over something when they can't see the landing area beyond. If you have a fence that they can easily clear, plant some midsize shrubs on the other side so that they can't see what's beyond. Another option instead of a fence is to plant a hedge that they can't see over. Keep in mind that they will try to find a way around it if they've already found that your garden has the best eats on the block.
 2. Deer don't like to climb so a terraced garden won't be appealing terrain.
 3. Think of your yard as having zones. If you must plant a few of their favorite plants, put them close to your house where you can monitor them instead of at the edge of your property where they will have easy access. Think about using containers when possible and keep them on the patio, deck or porch. However, some hungry deer have actually been spotted eating a plant on the front porch.
 4. If you want to grow vegetables, put your tomato plants in containers or Earth Boxes on your deck or patio. Plant the low growing vegetables in the garden but use row covers or make a wire frame to cover your square foot garden. Keep in mind that pollinators need to have access to squash and some other vegetables.
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5. Use a combination of plants in a bed with deer favorites tucked behind or in between plants that they don't like.

Deterrents

There are many types of deterrents that work on different principles. Most use scare tactics while others use an unpleasant taste or smell. Be careful of snake-oil salesmen, especially on the internet, who claim guaranteed results for a hefty price. Remember that deer will get used to deterrents and start to ignore them so it's best to use multiple deterrents, rotate them and in some cases, move them.

1. **Sprays** – Some of these use smell, others use taste and some use a combination of taste and smell as deterrents. These include Liquid Fence, Deer Off, I Must Garden Deer Repellent, Deer Scram, Not Tonight Deer, etc. Some repellants also come in granular form. The key to success with sprays is frequency of application, per package directions, alternating with at least three different brands of sprays and rotating between the sprays. Deer will get used to one spray and eventually start ignoring it. Make sure you spray new growth and apply a different spray before the deer get used to the first one.
 2. **Predator urine or blood** – These work as scare tactics and can be purchased at garden supply stores. They may work for a while but once deer realize that no wolf is lurking in your garden, they will ignore the smell of wolf urine. Blood-based products can also work for a while but you may find that you've attracted a raccoon, cat, or, heaven forbid, a coyote to your yard.
 3. **Mechanical deterrents** – One mechanical device that often works is called a "Scarecrow" impulse sprinkler. It has a sensor that can be adjusted for activation by large or small animals. The sudden spurt of water and sound will usually scare the deer. You'll need to run a garden hose to it and will need multiple units if you want to protect more than one area of your yard. Keep in mind that it may zap any visitors if you have it directed toward that garden bed near the driveway.
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4. **Homemade spray concoctions** – You can find recipes for spray deterrents that include eggs, tobacco, garlic, etc. These work in the same way as many of the store-bought sprays.
 5. **Noise deterrent** – You can place a portable radio in a vulnerable area tuned to talk radio, music or in-between station static. Move it around or the deer will get used to it and start to ignore it.
 6. **Soap** – Put a string through a bar of strong smelling soap and hang it from tree branches or shrubs. Unfortunately you'll need a lot of soap because it will only protect a 3 foot radius.
 7. **Pet hair** – Deer have gotten so used to us that human hair no longer works as a deterrent. Place pet hair in strategic areas in your garden. Visit a pet grooming facility to get a good supply and replace it before it loses its effectiveness.
 8. **Clear Fishing Line** - String clear fishing line around shrubs 2 to 3 feet high. Bumping into it with their nose will startle them when they try to nibble on the shrub.

The rule of thumb for luring deer into your yard is to provide their favorite plants, use lots of fertilizer, and water well to provide the lush, succulent new growth that deer love.



Resources:

- <http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/deer-problems-in-the-landscape.pdf>
 - <http://carteret.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Deer-Resistant-Plants2.pdf>
 - <http://pender.ces.ncsu.edu/2013/04/is-there-anything-deer-will-not-eat>
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