



Oh, Deer (Part 2)

In a vegetable garden, you have more to worry about than keeping deer out – groundhogs and rabbits are also destructive, making a fence essential if one is to harvest anything for the table. With ornamental plants, however, the home gardener can make choices that are less delectable to the deer.

WOODY ORNAMENTALS

I'm happy that three of my favorite species are seldom hit by deer. The first is the shrub-sized plant **Bluestar** (*Amsonia hubrichtii*) that offers powdery blue flowers in the spring, feathery green foliage in the summer and antique-gold color in the fall. The second is **Chaste tree** (*Vitex agnus-castus*); with its fragrant foliage and flowers, this butterfly magnet has the appearance of butterfly bush (*Buddleja*) but isn't invasive. Last are the **Viburnums**; every garden needs them for fragrant flowers, ornamental berries and fall color. (Deer have not paid any attention to my beloved viburnums, although some gardeners have reported damage.)

Rarely damaged shrubs include: **abelia** (a terrific multi-season, underused butterfly attractor), **barberry** (*Berberis*), **boxwood** (*Buxus*), **American holly** (*Ilex opaca*), **crepe myrtle** (*Lagerstroemia*), **leucothoe** and **pieris**.

Also less likely to get chewed: **yellow- and red-stemmed dogwoods** (*Cornus sanguinea*, *C. sericea*), **redvein enkianthus**, **forsythia**, **Chinese holly** (*Ilex cornuta*), **inkberry** (*Ilex glabra*), **mountain laurel** (*Kalmia*), **bayberry** (*Myrica now renamed Morella*) and **wisteria**.

Garden plants that are often severely impacted by deer include **flowering quince** (*Chaenomeles*), **cotoneasters**, **hydrangeas**, **Japanese holly** (*Ilex crenata*), **weigela**, deciduous **azaleas** and **rhododendrons**. Their favorite, of course, is **English ivy**. Oh, did I mention **hybrid tea roses**?

HERBACEOUS PLANTS

Deer can feast upon herbaceous plants and annuals during the growing seasons. When designing new borders or filling in gaps, it is wise to avoid favorite deer-eatables (no matter how much one would like to grow them). Being careful

On last month's journey, I outlined the dietary requirements of white-tailed deer, their increasing population and loss of habitat, and the consequences on our home gardens, specifically where conifers are concerned. Let's continue the discussion and focus on shrubs and herbaceous plants.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY DR. RICHARD L. BITNER

about choices will be less expensive and more satisfying in the long term.

There are some characteristics that are common among any list of deer-resistant perennials and annuals. Plants that deer find to be offensive often have fuzzy foliage (like lamb's ears) or are highly aromatic (for instance, lavender, caryopteris, mints and various sages). Deer also seem to avoid plants that have thick foliage or thorny stems. Some plants, like euphorbias, exude sap that acts as an irritant (it's known to cause skin sensitivity in humans also). Keep these features in mind when making selections beyond those I've suggested are safe. And don't forget that deer prefer fertilized and irrigated plants!

MY STAND-BY, DEER-PROOF HERBACEOUS PLANT LIST:



Euphorbia



Hellebores



Lavender

Euphorbia (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*): A tough groundcover; tolerant of any conditions

Bergenia: Bold-textured and ideal for shade gardens

Hellebores: My favorite garden plant

Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*):

Fragrant and great for drying
Lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina*): I like the cultivar 'Big Ears' because the foliage is bolder, and the flowers are sparse and white.

Lavender cotton (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*): A fragrant strewing herb

Yarrow (*Achillea*): 'Moonshine' is the workhorse selection, but there are many color choices available.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*): The cook in the family will make use of this.

Lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*): A wonderful choice for the front of borders



Lady's mantle



Lupines

Globe thistle (*Echinops*): A favorite honey bee magnet, although its abundant seedlings can become a nuisance

Lupines (*Lupinus*): Eye-stopping; it seeds around politely when it finds conditions to its liking.

Rose campion (*Lychnis coronaria*): I like the brassy magenta one; also available in white for those with blander tastes.

Salvias: Dozens are available (those with fragrant foliage are typically left alone).

Poppies (*Papaver*):

I like the bright spots of drama the orange *P. atlanticum* brings to the garden. Conscientious trimming of the spent flowers extends the flowering throughout the summer, but be sure to leave some to go to seed.

Joe-pye weed (*Eupatorium fistulosum*): A butterfly magnet



Ornamental onion



Fern



Nepeta 'Walker's Low'

source for monarch butterfly caterpillars

Nepeta 'Walker's Low': Great in sweeps and a good companion for anything; can be sheared for later season rebloom

Lily of the valley (*Convallaria*): Old-fashioned favorite

Pachysandra: Boring but a useful workhorse

Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*): Shrub-like and airy, it offers silver stems in winter.

Castor bean (*Ricinus*): Folklore claims it keeps moles away, but your local regulations might forbid growing it.

Trilliums: You might be lucky enough to have them growing in your woods.

Sedums: Great for sunny border groundcovers and in containers

Additional perennials that are deer-resistant: **agastache**, **kniphofia**, **yucca**, **artemisia**, **dianthus**, **guara**, **echinacea**, **baptisia**, **dahlias**, **snapdragons**, **geranium**, **dusty miller**, **bleeding heart** (*Dicentra eximia and spectabilis*), **columbine** (*Aquilegia*), **campanula**, **bachelor buttons** (*Centaurea*), **coreopsis**, **digitalis**, **gaillardia** (but rabbits eat it to the ground), **coral bells** (*Heuchera*), although mine were hit for the first time this past winter, and **bee balm** (*Monarda*).

The deer-resistant annuals include:

melampodium, **zinnias**, **ornamental peppers**, **wax begonias**, **calendula**, **ageratum**, **cleome**,

datura (deadly for livestock),

marigolds,

nicotiana (its relative, tobacco

plant, is deadly to humans!) and

snapdragons.

Ornamental grasses

are immune, but choose natives

like **switchgrass**

(*Panicum virgatum*) rather than the invasive

Asian silvergrass

Miscanthus

species (*miscanthus*.
cfans.umn.edu).

And make note that deer

will relish these annuals:

ornamental sweet potato,

impatiens,

celosia, **pansies**,

daylilies, **hosta**,

Rudbeckia

'**Goldsturm**' and

clematis.

Take these lists along to the nursery. By planting a wide variety of deer-resistant plants, you won't end up with an entire section of your garden decimated when the neighborhood deer are on their gardening journey.



Coral bells



Datura



Nicotiana

DR. RICHARD L. BITNER is a horticultural lecturer and photographer. He is the author of three books on conifers, most recently *Designing with Conifers: The Best Choices for Year-Round Interest in Your Garden*. He also teaches a conifers course at the Barnes Foundation's Arboretum School in Merion. His website is ConifersForGardens.com.