

DEER RESISTANT PLANTS

Deer may become your least favorite backyard visitor when they munch everything from the arborvitae to your prized roses. But you can keep deer from becoming a pest in several ways, including a shift in your landscaping regime to some of their least favorite plants.

Mule deer and whitetail deer in eastern Washington are “browsers.” That means they eat “browse,” on the growing tips of shrubs, trees, and other plants. Evidence of browsing is the ragged tips where the twigs have been broken. (Rodents and rabbits leave a clean cut when they browse.)

In late winter and early spring most deer use grass, clover, and other forbs and legumes in their diet. In fact, during February and March when snowcover usually fades, temperatures rise, and sunlight hours noticeably increase, deer are out in droves on almost anything edible. That’s because they’re trying to regain calories lost during winter when it usually costs them more in body energy to look for food than what they gain from it.

Plant use by deer varies by the number of deer in the area, the availability of alternative food sources, winter weather conditions, and plant preferences. From area to area, deer also have different tastes. Young plants may be eaten and older plants of the same species left alone, especially in early spring when deer are trying succulent new growth of plants they otherwise would not eat.

Fencing is still the only consistently effective tool for reducing deer damage. Deer can be kept out of areas with eight-foot high net-type wire fencing that is properly installed. Chicken wire will work if posts are not more than 12 feet apart and the wire is stretched tight and anchored to the ground so deer don’t crawl under. Believe it! Deer will crawl. Board fences and solid hedges need only be 5 ½ feet high; deer won’t jump over objects when they can’t see what’s on the other side.

Exclusion devices such as cylinders of welded-wire mesh placed around individual trees and shrubs can protect them. This will also prevent bucks from rubbing their antlers on trees – breaking branches or girdling trunks. New seedlings and very young trees can be protected with plastic mesh tubes or netting. Fine mesh chicken wire laid out on the ground around plants can also dissuade deer because they don’t like to get their feet in the wire.

Commercial deer repellents are carried by many garden shops; most made from a base of blood or bone meal.

You may order a copy of Comparison of Commercial Deer Repellents from USDA Forest Service, MTDC Bldg.1, Fort Missoula, Missoula, MT 59804-7294. Home remedies include hanging bars of deodorant soap or mesh bags of human hair, or spraying plants with a mixture of raw eggs and water. All products have varying degrees of success and usually must be reapplied after rain.

Scare tactics can move deer out of an area, although sometimes only temporarily, depending on how established their eating habits have become. Try connecting bright lights, radios, or water sprinklers to motion detectors.

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“Deer-resistant” (or close to it!) plants* are one option for coexisting with deer is to plant or replace damaged plants with more. These are species that tend to be (but not always!) a deer’s least favorites. The following list includes “best bets” for keeping deer disinterested. It should be considered a guide rather than the final word.

Annuals/ Biennials:

- *Ageratum*
- *Antirrhinum* (Snapdragon)
- *Aquilegia spp.* (columbine)
- *Calendula*
- *Campunula medium* (Canterbury bell)
- *Cosmos*
- *Cynoglossum amabile*
(Chinese forget-me-not)
- *Digitalis* (foxglove)
- *Euphorbia marginata* (Snow-on-the-mountain)
- *Helianthus annuus* (Sunflower)
- *Jacobaea maritima* (Dusty miller)
- *Lobularia maritime* (Sweet alyssum)
- *Mirabilis jalapa* (Four o’clock)
- *Papaver spp.* (poppy)
- *Salvia* (Meadow Sage)
- *Tagetes* (Marigolds)
- *Zinnia*

Deciduous Shrubs:

- *Berberis* (Barberry,
DO NOT plant *Berberis vulgaris*)
- *Cornus sericea* (Red-twig dogwood)
- *Cotoneaster*
- *Daphne*
- *Kerria japonica* (Kerria)
- *Potentilla*
- *Ribes aureum* (Golden currant)
- *Ribes sanguineum* (Red-flowered currant)
- *Sambucus* (Elderberry)
- *Syringa vulgaris* (Lilac)

Evergreen Shrubs:

- *Artemisia tridentata* (sagebrush)
- *Berberis* (Evergreen barberry)
- *Buxus spp.* (boxwood)
- *Ericameria nauseosa* (Rabbitbrush)
- *Ilex spp.* (holly, with thorns)
- *Juniperus* (juniper)

- *Mahonia* (Oregon grape)
- *Pinus mugo* (Mugho pine)
- *Rhododendron* (but not azaleas)

- *Sambucus racemosa* (red elderberry)
- *Spirea*

Herbs and Vegetables:

- *Allium schoenoprasum* (Chives)
- *Cucumis sativus* (Cucumbers)
- *Lavandula* (Lavender)
- *Mentha piperita* (peppermint)
- *Mentha spicata* (spearmint)
- *Origanum* (Oregano)
- *Origanum majorana* (Marjoram)
- *Rosmarinus officinalis* (Rosemary)
- *Salvia officinalis* (common Sage)
- *Solanum lycopersicum* (Tomatoes)
- *Solanum tuberosum* (Potatoes)
- *Thymus vulgaris* (Thyme)

Trees (when young, must be protected from deer):

- *Abies* (fir)
- *Acer* (Maple)
- *Cedrus* (cedar)
- *Corylus spp.* (hazelnut/filbert)
- *Cotinus coggygria* (smoke tree)
- *Picea* (spruce)
- *Pinus* (pine)
- *Prunus virginiana* (Chokecherry)
- *Pseudotsuga menziesii* (Douglas fir)
- *Quercus* (Oak)
- *Rhus* (Sumac)
- *Robinia pseudoacacia* (black locust)

Perennials/Bulbs:

- *Achillea spp.* (yarrow)
- *Aquilegia* (Columbine)
- *Armeria maritime* (Seathrift)
- *Asclepias tuberosa* (Butterfly weed)
- *Campanula rotunifolia* (Bluebells)
- *Campunula medium* (Canterbury bells)
- *Cerastium tomentosum* (Snow in-summer)
- *Clematis spp.*
- *Coreopsis spp.*
- *Delphinium spp.* (larkspur)
- *Dicentra* (bleeding heart)
- *Erysimum* (Wall-flower)

Perennials/Bulbs (continued):

- Ferns
- *Gaillardia* (Blanket flower)
- Helleborus Hellebore
- *Hemerocallis spp.* (daylily)
- *Heuchera* (Coral bells)
- *Iris*
- *Lavandula spice* (English lavender)
- *Liatris spicata* (Gay feather)
- *Linum usitatissimum* (Flax)
- *Lupinus spp.* (lupine)
- *Paeonia spp.* (peony)
- *Papaver spp.* (poppy)
- *Phlox subulata* (Creeping phlox)
- *Rudbeckia hirta* (Black-eyed Susan)
- *Rudbeckia hirta* (gloriosa daisy)
- *Symphoricarpos* (Snowberry)
- *Trillium spp.*
- *Yucca*
- *Zantedeschia spp.* (calla lily)

If you'd rather keep the plants you already have, (or if you can attest to "your" deer's use of the above plants), use the other ways to discourage deer.