

PLANTS DEER MIGHT IGNORE (IF THERE IS SOMETHING PREFERABLE TO EAT NEARBY!)

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The theme of the year is deer eating everything! As we all know, it has been so dry that deer, and other wildlife, are desperate for food and will eat many plants that they might pass over if there were more choices on the buffet table.

So, what is a person to do? Well, there are several things, and combination of them will be required for even a bit of control. I will get to plant selection soon, but here are some tips and techniques; try several to find what works for your situation.

Highly effective, but not highly attractive, is to cover plants with plastic or metal netting or mesh. Or surround individual plants with fencing. This might be something to consider just for those 'pride and joy' plants.

Deer repellents sprayed on the plant are, make that can be, successful. Purchase them or make your own using chili peppers and other ingredients (check online for recipes). The downside of these is that they must be reapplied at least weekly, and after every rain. Adding a spreader-sticker will make them more effective; these products help any spray cover the leaf and stick to it better. Bonide, Fertlome, and others make spreader-stickers in home gardener size containers.

Set up a barrier around plants – this can take various forms. A fishing line fence made by wrapping fishing line (use clear, 30-pound test line) around posts tightly, at about 18 inches and 30 inches off the ground, and one more about 48 inches high if you choose. When deer touch it, they know something is there but since they cannot see it, they do not know how high it is to jump over it.

Surround plants with rocks several feet out from the trunk. Fist-size rocks, placed with a wee bit of space between them will result in a surface that moves a bit and that their dear little deer feet might not feel secure walking over. Something else that messes with their walking comfort is chicken wire or lattice panels, either laid right on the ground or lifted a bit on bricks. The grass underneath must be kept mowed for this to be effective.

If you have saved up your money, a motion activated sprinkler is said to be the best deterrent. The taller the better, and it must have an infrared sensor to work at night.

As far as the plants themselves, there are some general characteristics that deer dislike; those with leaves that have a strong smell, are fuzzy, or are prickly or leathery; also, plants with milky sap, and ornamental grasses (as opposed to turfgrass). Examples of these are below. Again, all of this is dependent on how hungry they are.

Aromatic plants, which are quite reliably deer resistant, include members of the mint family (look for a square stem) - all the salvias (also called sage), such as Indigo Spires, tropical sage, and mealy blue sage; as well as spearmint and peppermint. Also, rosemary, garlic, chives, and other herbs, plants in the *Tagetes* genus (marigolds, Copper Canyon daisy, Mexican Mint Marigold), catmint, and the beebalms.

You can experiment with planting a scent barrier, using a mixture of some of these plants, in front of or around the plants the deer love. It would need to be at least a couple of feet deep.

Fuzzy and tough leaf plants include cenizo (Texas sage), wooly stemodia, Jerusalem artichoke, santolina, artemisia, Dusty Miller, Texas lantana, anaqua, and yaupon holly.

A few plants with prickly leaves are agarita, sotol, prickly pear, and yucca. There are many others of course. However, deer do not seem to mind the thorns on roses. All milkweeds and periwinkle (vinca) have sticky, milky sap that deer are almost sure to avoid.

While deer will eat turfgrass, they avoid the native 'ornamental' grasses such as the many species of Muhly grass, including Gulf, Big, Bamboo, and Weeping Muhly; also, sideoats grama, inland sea oats, and little bluestem.

There are a number of other beautiful plants deer often skip over that do not fit in the mentioned categories – flame acanthus, firebush, thryallis, Esperanza, cape honeysuckle, Mexican honeysuckle, snapdragon vine, yarrow, Mexican hat, chili petin, frogfruit, and Texas Mountain laurel.

Different people will have different approaches, depending on how much time and effort they want to spend on protecting plants. I think a good approach is to grow and protect a few special plants (that the deer also think are special), keep what the deer mostly leave alone, and when you add plants, select ones that are deer resistant.