

Bell County Master Gardeners
Tip of the Week
By Frances Idoux
“Some Deer Solutions May Be Over Our Heads”

Sometimes the solutions to gardening challenges are simply over our heads. The most persistent challenges in my garden have four feet and hearty appetites. They are the deer -- certainly not dear to gardeners. I have tried the recommended remedies: bars of pungent soap, various odiferous sprays, and mounds of pet hair. I have selected deer resistant plants, but my deer have not read the list. As a consequence, Round One in the gardening competition definitely has gone to the deer!

During a trip to the Hill Country, I discovered a new tactic. In search of brunch, I found a restaurant that is also part garden. In the courtyard, magnificent oak trees hold an amazing assortment of hanging baskets, all overflowing with plants. The owner is the gardener, who evidently came down with a planting spree this spring. As a result, hanging baskets are everywhere, as well as plants in pots of the wrought iron fence. Blooms of red, white, and coral impatiens nestle happily with Turk's Cap and dwarf Mexican heather. Chocolate mint and pineapple sage are tucked into baskets filled with herbs.

Eureka! By using hanging baskets I could grow all those plants that had served as appetizers for my visiting deer. Now branches of my oak tree are adorned with baskets -- some similar to the ones I'd seen and some with unusual occupants, such as a solitary caladium. I even found a few sunny spots for colorful portulacas.

Even for gardeners who do not co-exist with deer, hanging baskets can be an asset. Planting does not involve digging, just arranging plants in potting soil. Water usage is minimal, although regular watering is necessary. But color and variety are wonderful summertime rewards.

For me, there is satisfaction in seeing plants flourish un-chewed. But the real victory song was the buzz of a hummingbird as he discovered the first bloom of the Turk's Cap.

As for now, Round Two belongs to the gardener!

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

Bell County master gardeners are taking applications for the next class starting January 2013. Applications can be downloaded from the website or picked up at the AgriLife Extension Office, 1605 North Main, Belton, Texas. [254-933-5305](tel:254-933-5305). The all-inclusive fee is \$250.

