

What Plants Will Survive Visiting Deer?

by Joyce Friels, Bell County Master Gardener

You have moved into a house that is located in an area in the outskirts of the city proper. You are excited about your new home and having a yard to landscape. It takes time to get everything unpacked and put away. You promise yourself that as soon as the furniture is arranged, the curtains are up and all the boxes are unpacked, you will take time to think about your yard and how you want it to look. You have always dreamed of a beautifully landscaped yard with flowerbeds around the many trees and colorful plants in the front yard to welcome guests. The back of the house has some shade with large oak trees so this would be another place to put some plants to brighten up the area around the patio.

You have been so busy getting the house in order, getting the children registered in their schools, and locating the important and necessary businesses that you will be using on a regular basis that you haven't really paid any attention to the other yards in your area. You finally take time to look at your neighbors' yards to see what plants they have or have not growing in their yards. Most of these yards look pretty stark, but your yard will be a real show place! Whew! Okay, now you have everyone back on a schedule so you are ready to concentrate on the yard and how it should look. You go to the local library to look through some gardening magazines to get an idea of what to plant. You come out with all kinds of ideas so you head to the nearest nursery or garden center. Wow! So many different plants to choose - they will look good in your yard! And the nursery person said this is a good time of the year to plant as the weather is still warm enough to give the new plants time to get a good root system growing. You dedicate the next weekend to planting all the new plants in your new flower beds and can visualize them in full bloom. They really make a big difference in brightening up the whole yard.

On Monday morning you are busy running the family taxi but as you come back to your house and drive in the driveway, you notice something! There is no color! Some of the flower beds are bare! What happened? That is the oddest thing. You see one of your neighbors in their yard so you go over to say >hello=. During your conversation, they tell you that they have given up on having a nice colorful yard with pretty flowering plants because the deer eat everything! DEER! Now, you remember that your children were saying they had seen deer standing out at the edge of the property line behind the chain link fence. Well, you are going to do some research to find some plants that deer will not eat!

After months of frustration and trial and error in trying new plants, you notice that the scarlet sage and the lamb's ear that you planted have not been eaten. With this information you decide to ask the county extension office about deer resistant plants. They send you an extensive list of plants that deer seem to leave alone. It states on the list that if the deer are hungry enough they will eat anything so no plant is absolutely safe from the deer. As you read through the list you note all the varieties of sages that are listed. Also, the lantana that is listed, you have seen that plant flowering on the lot behind yours and it has not been eaten. With notes in hand, you again go plant shopping at your favorite garden center. You also talk with the nursery person to see what plants they recommend to be deer resistant in your area.

This time you come home with several different varieties of sages that are different colors and grow to various heights and widths: May night, salvia greggii (cherry sage), mealy blue sage, Mexican bush sage, and some more scarlet sage. You also decide to try some multi-color lantana and Mexican mint marigold. These choices will give a variety of color and texture to your landscape and they will bloom spring through fall. After these plants find a home in your landscape, you cross your fingers, say a prayer, and wait to see what happens. Well, you notice over the next several days that none of the plants have been touched. Oh! There is evidence that the lantana was tried, but spit out and not consumed! And every morning you can see fresh deer tracks in the flower beds but none of the plants have been touched. That is such good news! As you look around, you take note of the different plants you have chosen and you realize, after further research, that most of the plants you selected are native plants and perennials. So you may have discovered that a native plant, a perennial, or an adapted plant that smells bad, tastes unpleasant, is fuzzy or sticky on the palette, may be a good choice to find a home in your landscape.

After several weeks, and a couple of seasons of trial and error, you have discovered some plants that deer in your area have not eaten: Agarita, Artemisia, Monardas, Black-eyed Susan, Butterfly weed, Cedar sage, Dill, Flame Acanthus, Four-nerve daisy, Indian blanket, Iris, Rosemary, Dusty miller, Mealy blue sage, Salvia greggii, Periwinkle (Vinca) and Crepe myrtle. When the next planting time approaches you go

online to find even more choices of deer resistant plants. When visiting the Texas A&M website you get information on a wide variety of trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals. If you do your research and plan ahead, your home can be surrounded by the beautifully landscaped yard you have dreamed about - and DEER RESISTANT!!