

Year Round Gardening

Garden Wars

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Being a gardener and being a wildlife fan can feel like contradictory concepts when your garden becomes a constant battlefield with voracious rabbits, destructive voles, and marauding mule deer. Container gardening can provide good armor from the rabbits and voles but you will need to be a bit more tactical to minimize deer attacks.

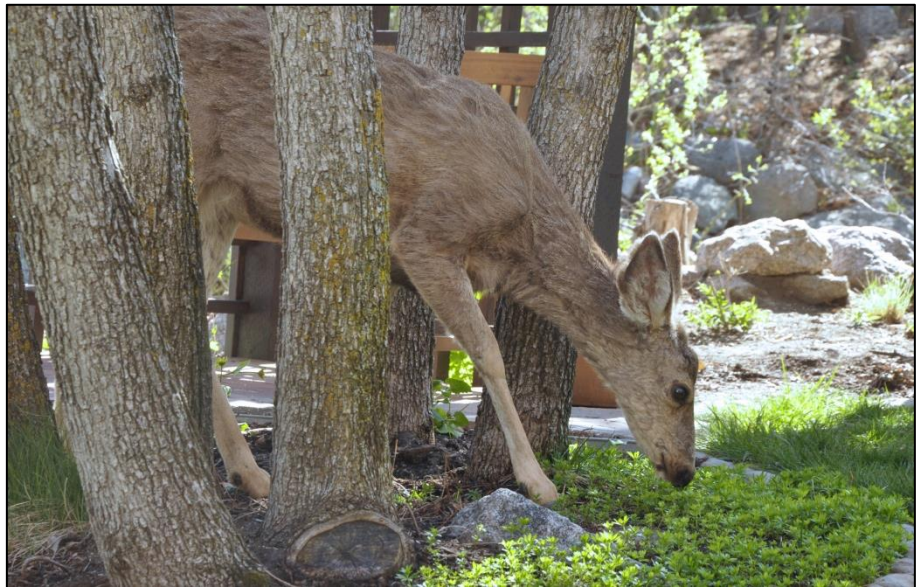


Photo courtesy of Freddie Bogardus

First, when developing your garden war strategy, it is important to acknowledge the fact that there is no such thing as a deer-resistant plant. Period. Deer will eat anything when deer populations are high and food becomes scarce.

Next, know your enemy. Taste preferences vary from deer to deer and season to season; however, in general, deer like nutrition-rich plants, especially in spring and summer when does are pregnant or nursing and young deer are growing. Fertilized plants, such as those in home landscapes, provide protein, energy-rich carbohydrates, minerals and salts. Deer also get about one-third of their water intake from the moisture in irrigated plants and young, succulent vegetation on expanding leaves, buds and green stems.

Plan a defensive strategy, and although there are schemes to make gardens less attractive to deer, none of them are 100 percent effective all of the time. Certain plants can provide some protection in your garden because in general, deer do not like plants with a bitter taste, those with pungent aromas or strong-scented plants like lavender, lantana, catmint, chives, mint, sage or thyme.

Planting these adjacent to more desirable plants that deer frequently devour is a good defensive move and may help deter their intentions. Some gardeners have also reported success with repelling deer by planting plants with fuzzy or leathery leaves, and typically deer will shy away from plants with prickly or rough leaves. Although there are a number of commercially available deer repellents on the market, none of them are 100 percent effective. Most "home remedy" repellents, such as soap, hot peppers or hot sauce, eggs, human hair and animal urine or dung, are unreliable. Fences, wire cages and plastic tubing can protect young trees and shrubs. If you want to grow plants that you know deer are going to attack, growing them closer to the house can be a deterrent to them.

In the long term, selecting plants that deer find less appetizing can reduce the number of battles (and the amount of money) you are going to lose. In your selection process, it is helpful to think of plants in these categories:

- **Often Browsed/Frequently Damaged Plants.** These are deer favorites and the first plants they will seek out to attack to the extent of destruction.
- **Sometimes Browsed/Occasionally Damaged.** These are the plants deer will turn to as their second line of defense against hunger once their favorites are depleted. They may nibble these but will usually not demolish them
- **Rarely Browsed/Seldom Damaged.** Deer will rarely eat these unless there are absolutely no other options.

The list of seldom damaged plants is excerpted from the CSU Ext. Fact Sheet #6.520 Preventing Deer Damage which can be found at <http://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/natural-resources/preventing-deer-damage-6-520/>. For a searchable data base of deer resistance of plants check out Landscape Plants Rated by Deer Resistance at <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/deerresistance/>.

PLANTS RARELY BROUSED BY DEER

FLOWERS

Black-eyed Susan, (*Rudbeckia* sp.)
California fuchsia, (*Zauschneria* sp.)
Daffodils, (*Narcissus* sp.)
Gaillardia/blanketflower, (*Gaillardia aristata*)
Gayflower, (*Liatris punctata*)
Grape hyacinth, (*Cynoglossum officinale*)
Larkspur, (*Delphinium nelsonii*)
Lavender, (*Lavandula* sp.)
Mariposa Lily, (*Calochortus gunnisonii*)
Mountain harebell, (*Campanula rotundifolia*)
Pearly everlasting, (*Anaphalis margaritacea*)
Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)
Russian sage, (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*)
Thyme, (*Thymus* sp.)
Yarrow, (*Achillea* sp.)

VINES

Virginia creeper, (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)

TREES AND SHRUBS

Apache plume, (*Fallugia paradoxa*)
Blue mist spiraea, (*Caryopteris x clandonensis*)
Common juniper, (*Juniperus communis*)
Douglas-fir, (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)
Hawthorn, (*Crataegus* sp.)
Mountain mahogany, (*Cercocarpus montanus*)
Oregon grape, (*Mahonia repens*)
Pinon pine, (*Pinus edulis*)
Potentilla/cinquefoil, (*Potentilla* spp.)
Rabbit brush, (*Chrysothamnus* sp.)