

Coping with the deer

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Many of us who live in the suburbs must share our environment with the native wildlife. For the most part, we can live in harmony with these creatures and derive considerable pleasure from their presence. At times the squirrels can cause great exasperation as we try to keep them out of the bird feeders and fruit and nut trees but the entertainment they provide as they frolic about the yard offsets any inconvenience they cause. We may speak harshly of the occasional skunk, possum or armadillo when they dig holes in our lawns as they search for grubs. And that pesky roadrunner seems to always have one of our insect eating anole lizards in his beak.

However, none of these critters seems to cause irreparable damage. The one that brings to bear serious heartburn though is the whitetail deer. Their natural ability to assimilate themselves into the residential community is exacerbated by those who delight in putting out food to attract them into their yards.

This graceful animal has absolutely no respect for the property of his human neighbors and possesses great athletic ability, making it difficult if not almost impossible to preclude its presence. They leap six-foot fences with ease. They come under the cover of darkness to determine what new delicacies have appeared since their last visit and I can not help but believe that they take the greatest of pleasure in nipping off the almost open buds of tomorrow's blossoms.

Much has been written and said about what the serious gardener can do to lessen the impact of the deer in his landscape. This usually includes a listing of those plants which deer are not supposed to like and the unqualified statement that repellents exist to fend them off your prized plants. I have found these writings and proclamations to be of little value to the person who is trying to put some variety into his landscape and do his share to improve the beauty of his surroundings. At the end of this article I will list those plants which I, through trial and error, have found to be least bothered by the deer.

The physical damage caused by the deer by means other than browsing is something that is seldom addressed by either those who would have us believe that the deer are a definite plus in our communities or by the horticultural experts as they dispense their advise. No small tree or shrub is safe from the buck that is rubbing the velvet from his antlers or marking his area. They not only cause breakage, but will rub the bark completely off a plant, girdling it and causing its eventual death. The only protection that I have found to be effective is to place an unsightly cage of fencing or concrete reinforcing mesh around the plant. Since I usually install small plants, this means a lengthy period of eyesores in the landscape.

This article is not meant to be a complete condemnation of the deer. They are, no doubt, here to stay. My main purpose is to pass on those things with which I have had some success. I have had good luck with most of the gray leaf plants, those with highly fragrant foliage, all of the salvias and most of the lantanas. Here is the listing of the plants which the deer do not seem to like well enough to severely damage by eating. However this list must be caveated like others I have seen; deer can't read and when they are hungry, they will eat almost anything.

Shrubs

Agarita (*Berberis trifoliolata*)
Boxleaf Euonymus (*Euonymus japonica 'Microphylla'*)
Bush Germander (*Teucrium fruiticans*)
Ceniza/Texas Sage (*Leucophyllum spp.*)
Elaeagnus or Silverberry* (*Elaeagnus pungens*)
Evergreen sumac (*Rhus virens*)
Goldcup (*Hypericum spp.*)
Gray Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster glaucophylla*)
Japanese Boxwood (*Buxus microphylla japonica*)
Japanese Yew (*Podocarpus macrophyllus*)
Nandina (*Nandina domestica*)
Oleander (*Nerium oleander*)
Pineapple Guava (*Feijoa sellowiana*)
Pomegranate (*Punica granatum*)
Primrose Jasmine (*Jasminum mesnyi*)
Reeve's Spirea (*Spirea reevesiana*)
Soft Leaf Yucca (*Yucca recurvifolia*)
Sotol (*Dasyilirion spp.*)
Texas Mountain Laurel (*Sophora secundiflora*)
Upright Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)
Yaupon Holly (regular and dwarf) (*Ilex vomitoria*)
Yucca (spp) All yucca with a sharp, stiff point

Ground Covers

Prostrate Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis Prostratus*)
Germander (*Teucrium chamaedrys*)
Gray Santolina or Lavender Cotton (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*) Green Santolina (*Santolina virens*)
Thyme (*Thymus spp*)
Wedelia* (*Wedelia trilobata*)

Perennials

Ageratum (*Eupatorium coelestinum*)
Amaryllis (*Hippeastrum x Johnsonii*)
Angel Trumpet (*Datura spp*)
Silver King Artemisia (*Artemisia ludoviciana*)
Autumn Sage (*Salvia greggii*)

Bearded Iris (Iris spp)
Blue Plumbago (Plumbago auriculata)
Candytuft (Iberis sempervirens)
Copper Canyon Daisy (Tagetes lemonii) Dusty Miller (Senecio cineraria)
Garlic Chives (Allium tuberosum)
Goldmoss Sedum (Sedum acre)
Gray Santolina or Lavender Cotton (Santolina hamaecyparissus)
Green Santolina (Santolina virens)
Hummingbird Bush (Anisacanthus wrightii)
Indigo Spires Salvia (Salvia 'Indigo Spires')
Jerusalem Sage (Phlomis fruticosa)
Lantana (Lantana spp)
Mallow Hibiscus (Hibiscus moscheutos)
Marguerite (Chrysanthemum frutescens)
Mealy Cup Sage (Salvia farinacea)
Mexican Bush Sage (Salvia leucantha)
Mexican Hat (Ratibida columnaris)
Mexican Honeysuckle (Justicia spicigera)
Mexican Mint Marigold (Tagetes lucida)
Mexican Oregano (Poliomintha longifolia)
Oxeye Daisy (Chrysanthemum leucanthemum)
Rock Rose (Pavonia lasiopetala)
Rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis)
Spined Prickly Pear Cactus (Opuntia spp)
Split Leaf Philodendron (P. selloum)
Texas Betony (Stachys coccinea)
Wedelia (Wedelia trilobata)
Wormwood (Artemisia absinthum)
Yarrow (Achillea millefolium)

Ornamental grasses

Inland sea oats (Chasmanthium latifolium)
Maiden Grass (Miscanthus sinensis)
Gulf Muhley (Muhlenbergia capillaris)
Lindheimer's Muhley (Muhlenbergia lindheimeri)
Pampas Grass (Cortaderia selloana)
Purple Fountain Grass (Pennisetum setaceum)

Flowers

Indigo Spires (Salvia spp.)
Larkspurs (Delphinium consolida)
Marigolds (Tagetes spp)
Mealy Cup Sage (Salvia farinacea)
Periwinkles (Catharanthus roseus)
Zinnias (Zinnia spp)

