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CHOOSING DEER-RESISTANT LANDSCAPE PLANTS

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As deer have become one of the major problems in many gardens, gardeners have begun learning what plants their neighborhood deer prefer or don't like. Deer preference for your landscape plants will vary with several factors, but there are some plants generally more resistant to deer feeding.

Deer seek plants rich in protein, especially in spring and summer as young grow and deer recover from our long northern winters. Well-fertilized garden plants provide this-- energy from carbohydrates, and minerals and salts. Since deer only can store protein nitrogen in small amounts, they need a steady supply during peak periods.

Deer also get about one third of their water from moisture in plants, hence the reason they prefer moist and tender plant parts. This is why they often go for new growth, usually on the outer parts of plants, such as new leaves and buds, or immature stems (such as on my garden phlox in early summer).

Certain smells of plants also attract deer, just as humans have certain generally attractive smells, be it popcorn or apple pie. Other times deer just may want to sample the newest additions to your landscape.

On the flip side, deer seem to know which plants are poisonous and to avoid, be they certain mushrooms, foxglove, or daffodils. Deer will avoid a plant they may have tried and didn't like, or which made them sick. But, hungry enough from lack of preferred food or too many deer in an area for the food available, and they will eat most any plant rather than starve.

Deer generally avoid plants with a strong aroma that hurts their delicate sense of smell, with fuzzy leaves such as lamb's ears, prickly leaves such as evergreen hollies or barberries, or with a bitter or alkaloid taste such as yarrow. Deer rely on their fine sense of smell as an early warning system of approaching danger. Mask this, using aromatic plants, and deer tend to stay clear. Some such fragrant plants that generally deter deer include catmint, chives, lavender, mint, sage, and thyme. Some gardeners interplant these among more favored deer plants to keep them away from such plants and gardens.

Lists of resistant plants are a good way to start thinking about your landscape, and to help to varying degrees, just don't rely on such plants as foolproof all the time and in all places. That is why there are almost no plants that are "deer-proof", but merely resistant. Keep in mind with lists of resistant plants that they will vary with expert, region, deer pressure and food source, deer preferences, and may even be contradictory. Some plants that appear both on lists of plants deer like and don't like include clematis, iris, forsythia, dahlias, vinca, trillium, and peonies.

Which plants are resistant also will vary with year, and season. When deer are hungry in early spring after a long hard winter, most anything green (such as your tulips) is a treat. Later in the summer they may get more selective, in late summer try out some new plants so far left untouched, and in fall start serious grazing (as in spring) to store up for winter.

Some woody plants that deer generally prefer, so you might avoid if you have many deer in your area, include yews, euonymus (burning bush), hybrid tea roses, and saucer magnolia. There are some roses less palatable (generally with more thorns), such as the rugosa hybrids, some shrub roses such as Harison's Yellow, and some Moss roses. Herbaceous plants deer generally eat include crocus, dahlias, daylilies, hostas, impatiens, phlox, and trillium. Some refer to the flowers of lilies and tulips as deer bon-bon candies.

Some trees generally resistant to deer include spruce, pines, honey locust, river birch, and buckeyes. Some shrubs that are generally deer resistant include bush cinquefoil, barberries (considered invasive, and so not planted, in many areas),

blue mist shrub, forsythia, junipers, lilacs, evergreen hollies, many spireas, and many viburnum.

Some herbaceous plants to consider as resistant include astilbe, barrenwort, bee balm, blanket flower, bleeding heart, columbine, dead nettle, false indigo, ferns, globe thistle, hellebore, hollyhock, lungwort, lupine, meadowsweet, monkshood, mugwort, peony, primrose, purple coneflower, Russian sage, Siberian bugloss, speedwell, sunflower, and yarrow. Most ornamental grasses are considered deer resistant, including such ones as blue fescue, little bluestem, blue oat grass, maiden grass, reed grass, and panic grass.

Many bulbs generally are deer resistant, and include daffodils, fritillaries, Dutch iris, grape hyacinths, hyacinths, squill, and alliums. Some gardeners with deer problems interplant daffodils with tulips to train deer early (as daffodils bloom before most tulips) to stay away.

There are many other "resistant" plants and tips on choosing them, as well as deer control methods, in the book by Rhonda Massingham Hart, *Deerproofing Your Yard and Garden*.

[Return to Perry's Perennial Pages, Articles](#)