

University of Vermont
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Spring/Summer News Article

DEER-SCAPING

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Deer-scaping combines landscaping and garden plants not for deer, but to discourage them. It is one of three main control techniques, probably the one most try after deterrents but before resorting to fencing.

Here are ten deer-resistant strategies that relate to choosing and placing your plants, and to designing your landscape. These and many other tips can be found in the the book *Deerproofing Your Yard and Garden*, by Rhonda Massingham Hart. As with any controls, if the deer are hungry enough, only exclusion or proper fencing may work.

Choose deer resistant plants. This is the first place most begin. After you decide what type of plant you want for such features as foliage, texture, color, and habit, then choose from plants deer tend to avoid. Instead of hybrid roses for instance, substitute the more thorny rugosa ones. If you like spring bulbs, try daffodils instead of tulips. Of course make sure plants you choose will grow in your climate, soil, and site. If you must have a certain plant that deer like too, be ready to use repellents and other strategies.

Create entries to your property that are not attractive to deer. They are creatures of habit, so tend to beat down the same path. Find where they usually enter your property, and put the most deer resistant plants here. This is the place to begin using repellents and other strategies. Such entries may be the place for play areas, paved areas, groundcovers, or lawn.

Protect the perimeter or edges of your garden or property. You might use an unattractive (to deer) hedge that is fuzzy, thorny, or strongly aromatic. If the deer pressure isn't high, you might just mix such plants in a border for the same effect. I like to move pots of tender and fragrant herbs, such as rosemary and pineapple sage, that I have overwintered inside around the landscape in summer.

Uses terraces, multiple levels, wide hedges, or double fences around your landscape. This is another way to protect your perimeter. Deer can jump, but won't if they are not sure they'll have a safe landing. This is the idea behind low wire fences that slant outward. If you have a wood rail fence, just add another one four to five feet away to create this "unsafe" zone for deer clearance.

Use multiple levels within your landscape. Deer don't like climbing up and down, in and out of areas, or getting into confined spaces. Create intimate garden "rooms" with plantings, trellises, and walls. Use raised beds and sunken areas. Your landscape will be more interesting to you, but much less attractive to deer.

Camouflage your choice plants. You do this by confusing the deers' sensitive nose by interplanting highly aromatic plants such as garlic or herbs. They sense danger with their noses. If this sense is blocked, and they can't "smell" danger, they won't be comfortable. You also can hide choice plants with taller plants in front, or surround trees and shrubs with unappetizing plants. Create a "moat" of strong odors they have to cross to get to your plants, and they often may not even try, if they can see them.

Out of sight, out of mind, applies to deer and your landscape. If you have a tall or thorny hedge, or solid fence, deer won't be tempted by what they can't see. Put choice plants out of sight with such a hedge or aromatic border, or even a fence with vines. Remember deer have poor eyesight, so take advantage of this.

Remove cozy deer beds. Deer like to bed down in tall grass and brushy areas. Keep these trimmed, tidy, or mowed, even if on the edges of your landscape.

Keep up with the harvest. If you have fruit trees, keep drops picked up. Clear away corn, peas, and other favorite deer vegetables as soon as your harvest is done.

Substitute hardscape elements for plants. Do you have some gardens that deer just won't leave alone? Consider replacing them with landscape elements such as patios, benches, arbors, or statuary.

As with other deer control strategies and deterrents, deer-scaping techniques are best started before you have a problem. Train deer early that your landscape is either too unsafe, too much trouble, too bad tasting, or too aromatic, and maybe they will move on.

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