

What *Won't* the Deer Eat?

by Nan Booth Simpson, Woodcreek Beautification Chairman

No plant can truly be called deer proof. With the high density of Woodcreek's deer population and this year's drought conditions, I have observed deer eating plants that are listed as "*deer resistant*" in books and on numerous web sites. (Deer-resistant simply means plants that are normally ignored in favor of more palatable plants). As a practicing landscape architect, I am frequently asked for a list of plants the deer won't devour. I have several species in my garden that our now-starving deer have still not touched. You will notice that the plants I selected for the Woodcreek Entrance Garden have not suffered much damage either. I've listed these as **Category #1**. This list is an attempt to list the best plants to use here. For me, there has been a lot of trial and error. The first summer we lived here, deer actually ambled onto our front porch and ate Black-eyed Susan out of the pots, although every source I read insisted that this beautiful perennial is "extremely deer-resistant." We laughed and said someday a doe would ring the doorbell and ask what was in the fridge.

The plants in **Category #1** have thus far escaped nibbling in my garden. Some or all of them possess the following characteristics: bitter taste, coarse/tough hairy or prickly leaves and/or caustic milky/sticky sap. Some are poisonous, but to be poisoned, a deer must consume toxic foliage in an amount equal to 1% of its body weight in one day. Deer, which are browsers rather than grazers, generally take a couple of bites and move on.

Plants in **Category #2** include strongly aromatic plants. A limited number of these plants can be hidden within the scent barrier of Category 1 plants. Other plants in Category 2 reseed prolifically, grow rampantly or spread aggressively by underground roots. These plants thrive by outpacing the herd's appetites.

Strategies for Deterring Deer

Many gardeners have had success with "camouflage gardening," which is using a variety of plants that contain natural chemicals or other characteristics that deter deer from wanting to dine on them. Because deer rely on their sense of smell to determine what is safe and desirable to eat, one can create a scent barrier by using a variety of strongly aromatic plants, shrubs and herbs throughout the garden. A wide variety of strong odors is said confuse the deer, which will leave the area and go to a landscape where it can clearly identify what it is eating. Sometimes this works, although this year (2011) all bets are off...

Fencing or caging remains the surest way to deter deer. One can also start with trees that have trunks taller than the browse line (approx. 5-1/2' from the ground). Few of the large shade trees suitable for Hill Country gardens are sufficiently resistant enough to leave unprotected until they reach some maturity. Trees suffer two types of damage from deer: the foliage will be eaten to the browse line, and bucks often polish their antlers on resilient saplings and tree trunks under 3" in diameter. Another approach is to protect trees with a plant barrier. (I'm surrounding a small, inexpensive oak tree in my garden with tall grasses as an experiment in foiling the hungry deer; I'll report next year on whether this works.)

Be aware that deer will eat almost anything in spring (even in a wet spring). This is the time when many does are pregnant and the plants are the most tender and highest in nutrition. (This same lush growth occurs in new nursery stock whenever it is planted.) Hill Country gardeners should avoid fertilizing plants in early spring. New plantings can be sprayed with a deer repellent while the plants "harden off" and become less palatable to deer. Instead of fertilizing, promote growth and blooms by providing very healthy soil, which promotes stronger plants that are more deer-resistant, disease free and are more prolific producers of foliage.

Deer Resistant List (always subject to change)

Trees and Large Screening Shrubs

Category 1:

Anacacho Orchid Tree (*Bauhinia lunarioides*)
Arizona Cypress (*Cupressus arizonica*) EV
Ashe Juniper (*Juniperus ashei*) EV
Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*)
Desert Willow (*Chilopsis linearis*)
Oleander (*Nerium oleander* 'Hardy Pink', 'Hardy Red') EV
Retama (*Parkinsonia aculeata*)
Texas Mountain Laurel (*Sophora secundiflora*) EV
Texas Persimmon (*Diospyros texana*)
Vitex (*Vitex agnus-castus*)
Wax Myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*) EV
Yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*) EV

Category 2:

Crepe Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*)
Fig (*Ficus carica*)
Evergreen Sumac (*Rhus virens*) EV
Flowering Quince (*Chaenomeles japonica*)
Goldenball Leadtree (*Leucaena retusa*)
Loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*) EV
Mediterranean Fan Palm (*Chamaerops humilis*) EV
Mexican Buckeye (*Ungnadia speciosa*)
Red Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*)
Smooth Sumac (*Rhus glabra*)
Texas Buckeye (*Aesculus glabra arguta*)
Texas Redbud (*Cercis canadensis texensis*)

Shrubs

Category 1:

Agarita (*Berberis trifoliolata*) EV
Artemesia (*Artemesia* spp. 'Powis Castle') EV
Autumn Sage (*Salvia greggii*) EV
Boxwood (*Buxus microphylla*) EV
Cenizo/Texas Sage (*Leucophyllum* spp.) EV
Grayleaf Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster glaucophyllus*) EV
Dwarf Wax Myrtle (*Myrica pumila*) EV
Dwarf Yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*) EV
Fragrant Mimosa (*Mimosa borealis*)
Germander Sage (*Salvia chamaedryoides*)
Japanese Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii* 'Atropurpurea' or 'Rose Glow')
Jerusalem Sage (*Phlomis fruticosa*) EV
Juniper (*Juniperus* spp.) EV
Lantana (*Lantana horrida*) — natives resistant, hybrids not so much
Lavender (*Lavandula* spp.) EV
Leatherleaf Mahonia (*Mahonia bealei*) EV
Mexican Oregano (*Poliomintha longifolia*)
Oleander (*Nerium oleander* 'Hardy Red', 'Hardy Pink', 'Double Yellow') EV
Pride of Barbados (*Caesalpinia pulcherrima*)
Pyracantha (*Pyracantha coccinea*)
Primrose Jasmine (*Jasminium mesnyi*) EV
Red-leaf or Japanese Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*)
Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) EV
Sago Palm (*Cycas revoluta*)
Silverberry (*Eleagnus pungens*) EV
Texas Palmetto (*Sabal texana*)

Category 2

Abelia (*Abelia* spp.)
American Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*)
Bamboo (use clumping species only) EV
Bottlebrush (*Callistemon lanceolatus*) EV
Butterfly Bush (*Buddleia davidii*)
Cast-Iron Plant (*Aspidistra elatior*) EV
Desert Honeysuckle *Anisacanthus wrightii*
Dwarf Chinese Holly (*Ilex cornuta* 'Carissa') EV
Flame Acanthus (*Anisacanthus wrightii*)
Flowering Quince (*Chaenomeles* spp. 'Texas Scarlet')
Germander (*Teucrium* spp.) EV
Goldcup (*Hypericum* spp.)
Japanese Arelia (*Fatsia japonica*) EV
Japanese Yew (*Podocarpus macrophyllus*) EV
Mexican Silktassel (*Garrya lindheimeri*)
Nandina (*Nandina* spp.) — use non-berrying varieties only
Holly Osmanthus (*Osmanthus heterophyllus*) 'Gulftide' (tall) or 'Goshiki' (smaller, variegated)
Pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) 'Wonderful' (fruiting) or 'California Sunset' (ornamental)
Viburnum (*Viburnum tinus* 'Spring Bouquet')

Perennial Succulents and Lilies

Category 1:

Agave (*Agave spp.*)

Cactus (*Opuntia spp.*) — any with stout spines

Hen and chickens (*Sempervivum spp.*) — spiny varieties

Lily of the Nile (*Agapanthus spp.*)

Red Yucca (*Hesperaloe parviflora*) (flowers will be eaten)

Sotol (*Dasylirion spp.*)

Yucca (*Yucca spp.*)

Grasses:

Category 1:

Basket Grass (*Nolina texana*)

Inland Sea oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*)

Japanese Silver Grass (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Caberet')

Lindheimer's Muhly (*Muhlenbergia lindheimeri*)

Mexican Feather Grass (*Nassella tenuissima*)

Parry's Beargrass (*Nolina perryi*)

Pink Muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*)

Vines:

Category 1:

Carolina Jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*)

Coral Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*)

Evergreen Wisteria (*Millettia reticulata*)

Passion Vine (*Passiflora incarnata*)

Star Jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*)

Texas Wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*)

Ground Covers:

Category 1:

Artemisia (*Artemisia ludoviciana* 'Silver Queen')

Asparagus Fern (*Asparagus densiflorus* 'Sprengeri')

Gregg Dalea (*Dalea greggii*)

Lamb's Ears (*Stachys byzantia*)

Lenten Rose (*Helleborus orientalis* or *H. niger*)

Mondo Grass (*Ophiopogon japonica*)

Santolina (*Santolina spp.*)

Society Garlic (*Tulbaghia violacea*)

Vinca (*Vinca major*)

Wandering Jew (*Tradescandia pallida* 'Purpurea')

Woodfern (*Dryopteris spp.*)

Woolly Stemodia (*Stemodia lanata*)

Perennials:

Category 1:

Artemesia (*Artemesia spp.*)
Big Red Sage (*Salvia coccinea*)
Blackfoot Daisy (*Melampodium lecanthum*)
Bluebonnet (*Lupinus texensis*)
Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
Cedar Sage (*Salvia roemeriana*)
Cone Flower (*Echinacea angustifolia*)
Copper Canyon Daisy (*Tagetes lemmonii*)
Coreopsis (*Coreopsis spp.*)
Daffodil (*Narcissus spp.*)
Damianita (*Chrysantinia mexicana*)
Indigo Spires (*Salvia spp.*)—resistant when established; plant 1 gal or larger
Iris (*Iris spp.*)
Mealy Blue Sage (*Salvia farinacea*)
Mexican Bush Sage (*Salvia leucanthia*)
Mexican Mint Marigold (*Tagetes spp.*)
Russian Sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*)
Skullcap (*Scutellaria spp.*)
Texas Betony (*Stachys coccinea*)
Verbena (*Verbena spp.*)
Yarrow (*Achillea spp.*)
Yellow Columbine (*Aquilegia chrysantha*)
Zexmenia (*Zexmenia hispida*)

Herbs — deer usually leave the more pungent herbs alone

Germander (*Teucrium chamaedrys*)
Oregano, Marjoram (*Origanum spp.*)
Savory (*Satureia spp.*)
Spearmint (*Menta spicata*)
Thyme (*Thymus spp.*)

Ferns

Holly Fern (*Cyrtomium falicatum*)
Sword Fern (*Nephrolepis spp.*)
Wood Fern (*Dryopteris spp.*)

Annuals & Plants for Containers

Ageratum (*Ageratum spp.*)
Begonia (*Begonia spp.*)
Candlestick Senna (*Senna alata*)
Cosmos (*Cosmos bipinnatus*)
Dusty Miller (*Senecio cineraria*)
Periwinkle (*Vinca rosea*)
Yellow Bells/Esperanza (*Tecoma stans*)

Send questions or feed-back to me at any time (nan@season-by-season.com)

