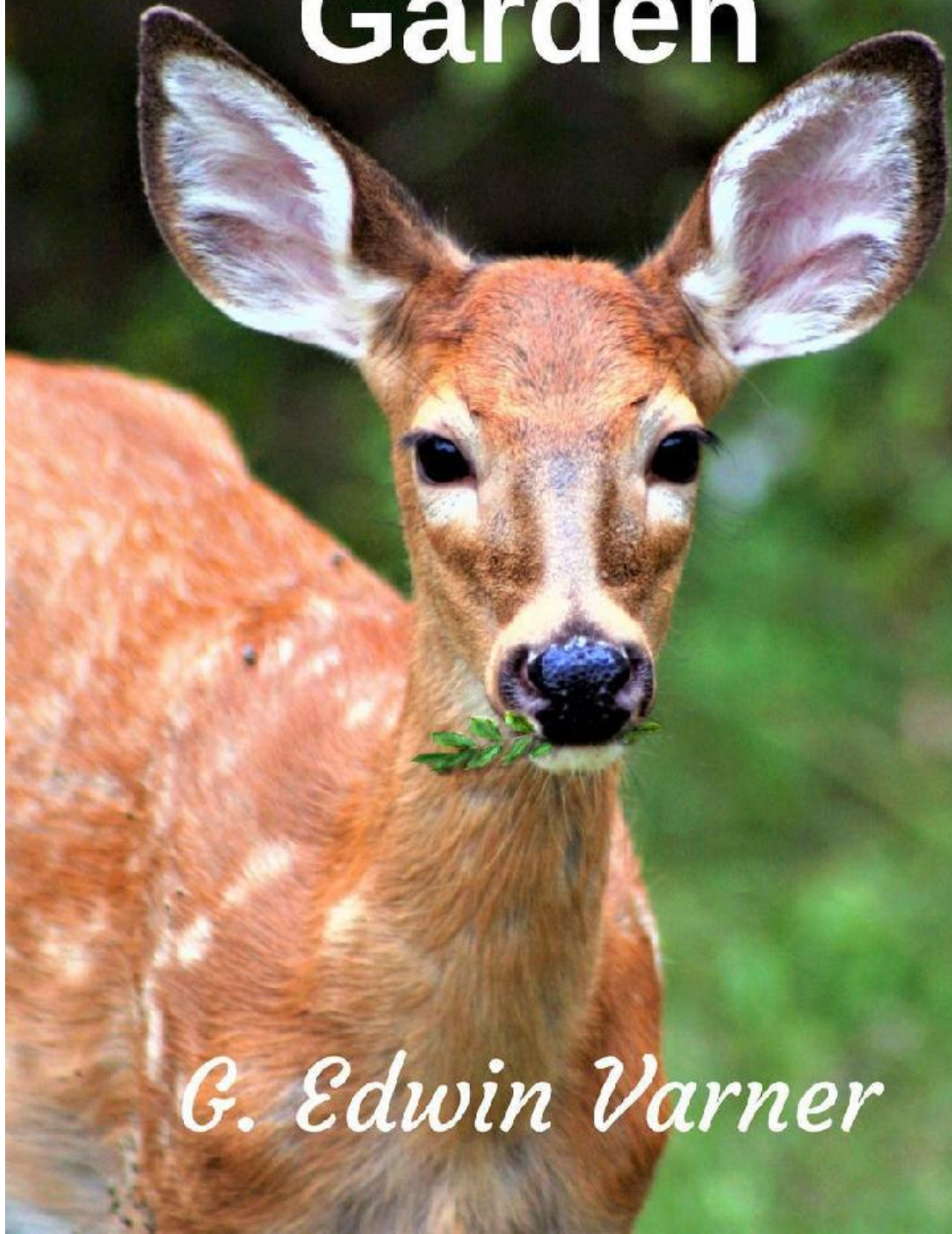


# Your Deer Departed Garden



*G. Edwin Varner*

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YOUR DEER DEPARTED GARDEN

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Written by G. Edwin Varner.

# Preface

This ebook differs from my other books on flower gardening for this one helps you discover deer-resistant plants to grow in your garden.

Flower and vegetable garden damage by deer are on the increase in many areas of the world. I have included information on the following plants that can help you deter them from your gardens. This is not a definitive listing for there are many other resistant plants.

Please understand the information in this ebook on deer behavior and the plants that can repel them may contain inaccuracies. I have tried to include plants many gardeners agree as being the most reliable in repelling them. It is important to note, no bona fide deer-repellent plants exist. Deer in one particular area will eat the following plants while in other regions deer will leave them alone. What a conundrum!

Plants listed in this ebook may not be available or replaced for better varieties by nurseries. I list their Latin name first then by a common name or names.

The digital photos are of the flowers at my home, public gardens, many nurseries within my area, and by Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images. Photos of the deer (including the cover photo) are courtesy of Pixabay.com.

# Introduction

No matter how many times you see them, you cannot express a sudden delightful shout of “Oh! Look at the deer!” It’s what they do when not viewed that can later make you angrily shout “Aghhh! Look what those [expletive deleted] deer did to my garden!”

In my location, and probably yours as well (unless you garden on the roof of a skyscraper), Whitetail Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and other related species are increasing in population each year. They try to avoid interactions with humans, but as living areas and food resources change, they need to coexist with us.

Though leery of us, they have adapted to our lawns and landscaping. Our plantings of vegetables, flowers, shrubs, and trees have aided in improving their health and fertility. Unlike grass-grazing animals such as cattle and horses, they are browsers for they eat broad-leafed plants and woody shoots. It is here in our gardens the problem with their behavior begins.

We should not blame them, but we do, when discovering they ate our treasured (and usually expensive) plants to the ground. Two questions always arise, “Why my garden and why is it always these plants?” Some perennials, like Hosta and Daylilies (*Hemerocallis*), are particular favorite delicacies. Other plants are popular “fast food” items while on the go.

Are there plants available they dislike but also display ornamental value? The answer is yes. The following plants are distasteful, difficult to eat or odoriferous, and should cause deer to move on to other areas to browse. One caveat is, results will vary.



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I will be very direct with you about the information in this ebook. In theory, based on past actions and observations by other gardeners, the following plants should keep deer away from your garden. In actuality, your actions may fail. The one major flaw with using deer deterrent plants is TIME. There is a significant time delay in having all plants, especially shrubs and trees, become large enough to act as deterrents.

Although listed as being “deterrents” or “resistant,” the following plants are not quick-fixes to prevent deer from visiting your gardens. There are no “deer-proof” plants; for every rule, there is always an exception.

Several factors are in play while trying to keep these animals out of your gardens. Starving deer will eat anything for basic survival, and those in one location will eat plants others, in different places, strictly avoid. There is no concrete rule or law that one particular type of plant all deer will avoid.

You can also intermingle resistant plants with those that deer love to eat. They may chew on a few yummy leaves or shoots, but they will also get a mouthful of bad tasting ones, causing them to lose interest and move on.

The following annual and perennial plants are a guide for what to plan and plant for future protection. I chose not to include several shrubs and trees for they take longer to become established as effective deterrents.

These plants share similar methods to help deter deer. These methods act together to form beautiful defense barriers to prevent them from causing too much damage to your garden plants. There are six primary deterrent methods you can use for your garden defense:

- Grow plants having robust scented foliage or flowers.
- Raise bad-favored plants with most having toxic properties.
- Provide plants having fuzzy, furry, or silvery-white foliage.
- Add plants having tough, stringy, prickly, spiny or thorny stems and leaves.
- Locate scented groundcovers, tall growing plants, and grasses on the periphery of your garden.
- Provide deer with nutritious food far away from your garden.

By growing together various representatives of plants in these categories you provide your garden better protection against these hungry critters. Using these plants on the periphery of your garden can help in confusing them if they want to venture forth to sample other plants.

You should also know planting one or two plants in an area will not offer any significant protection. Planting several deterrents form extended barriers which deer have trouble stepping into or around. The idea is to confuse them from further venturing into your flower or vegetable garden.

I know, all of this sounds like battle plans against a perceived enemy, even one as gentle and beautiful as “Bambi.” They are only eating our

garden plants for supplemental nutrition and basic survival, but can also do considerable property damage. Adding these ornamental plants discourages them from remaining in and returning to your garden.

**To find plants or seeds of the following species and varieties, please visit your nearby larger garden centers or search online to find specialty nurseries that grow and sell them.**

## These plants smell horrible to deer.



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Deer and other animals smell their meal first and then decide if it is edible. We do the same every day though we may not realize it. How many times have you smelled that carton or a jug of milk before pouring some onto your breakfast cereal? If the milk smells “off” – it’s poured down the drain. Many animals will avoid strongly scented leafy plants such as herbs and highly fragrant flowers.

The following plants are odoriferous to deer and are best grown outside or nestled alongside other but more valuable plants in your garden. This interaction is also a great tactic to use in your vegetable garden. **Please note:** A few of these plants are invasive in open ground.

It is best if you grow these in containers and move them around the yard or garden to help confuse the deer.

## **Achillea – Yarrow**



***Achillea*** – Famous for cottage and wild gardens, this hardy perennial (zones 3 to 9) can be invasive in more formal beds or borders unless contained to prevent from spreading.

A member of the Aster family, these plants can grow to three feet tall or more, depending on the fertility of the soil. The “flattened” flower clusters, called corymbs, can be white, light to dark pink, red or bright yellow. They bloom all summer if planted in full sun and well-drained soil.

The dark-green to silvery white, serrated leaves (depending on the variety) are pungently herbal scented. This herbal aroma, with the

rough texture of the leaves as a reinforcement, will usually stop deer (and rabbits) from consuming the plants after a quick nibble.

## **Agastache**



***Agastache*** –These beautiful perennials originate from the desert environment of the American southwest and into Mexico. Known for their tremendous flower production, long blooming, and exciting colors, these plants attract hummingbirds and butterflies all summer,

but it is the peppermint or fruity scent from the leaves and stems that help to repel deer.

Grow these plants in as much sunlight and dry, well-drained soil for best growth.

## Cassia – Popcorn Cassia



*Cassia didymobotrya* or *Senna didymobotrya* –This plant may or may not discourage deer for many gardeners do not grow it. Unusual and enjoyable, this African plant has vivid yellow, pea-like blossoms on long spikes. The top of each spike has black to dark purple, unopened buds. However, the real surprise is the leaves are scented of hot buttered popcorn when rubbed with your fingers.

I suppose this would be an exotic smell (and taste) to any deer or rabbit, but more observations need to confirm if this beautiful

flowering plant will repel them. Many insects do not dine on these leaves so that is a good sign deer will also avoid this plant.

Although classified as a shrub or small tree (which it is when growing in tropical Africa), in most areas it is a tender perennial or an annual. It is only hardy to zones 9 to 11. This plant is slowly becoming better known.

## **Centranthus – Keys of Heaven; Jupiter’s Beard; Red Valerian**



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***Centranthus ruber*** – One of the most prolific flowering and easiest to grow of perennials, this plant displays clusters of pink, rose-red or white, tiny blossoms all summer. A bonus is these flowers also release a light Lily-of-the-Valley perfume. Tall growing to nearly five feet, the

plant also spreads slowly outward forming an attractive bushy clump. A variety called *Centranthus ruber var. coccineus* grows more compact and has dark crimson red flowers.

Landscapers love *Centranthus* for it requires less maintenance, such as being able to survive drought and tolerates poor soil. It thrives in as much sunlight as possible and is hardy from zones 4 to 8.

Because of its tall growth and fragrant flowers, deer appear less enthralled by its presence and will bypass it to find more enjoyable plants to eat. This plant has great potential to be included in tall barrier plantings (explained later) to keep deer away from your flower beds or borders.

You can plant this perennial from seed – especially economical when planting in masses – or purchase individually potted named-varieties from larger online nurseries or garden centers.

Many gardeners agree, this plant, when grown in large clumps, is a showstopper in outstanding beauty. For our purpose here, it is also a deer invasion stopper!

## **Centratherum – Brazilian Bachelor Buttons**



***Centratherum intermedium camporum*** –If you are familiar with the regular annual Bachelor Buttons, this will look almost the same but with one noticeable exception – the leaves and flower heads have a strong pineapple or fruit punch fragrance. Because of the fragrant oils on the leaves, insects, and, possibly, deer dislike eating them.

To release that exceptionally strong fruit punch perfume, you need to handle the leaves and flowers. The hot sun can also release the fragrance but not as much as touching the plant. These blossoms are ever-blooming, blue to light purple and are double-petaled which makes them look ‘fluffy.’

The plant grows to nearly two feet tall and is bushy. It is an outstanding annual ideal for bedding and containers. **Button Beauty** is a recommended variety for the flower heads are much larger than the species.

Not readily grown (or available) in garden centers, there is not enough observable information if your neighborhood deer will find the smell and taste of this plant objectionable. For our noses, the scent is “delicious” ... however, will they agree? Time will tell if they dislike it.

Grow this colorful plant in full to part sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. Hardy to zones 10 and 11, it is strictly an annual for most areas. This plant grows quickly from seed and is enjoyable to smell and admire in any garden bed.

## **Cleome – Spider Flower**



***Cleome hassleriana*** –This annual plant provides deer (and us) with smelly and prickly leaves and stems. The only redeeming quality I have discovered with this garden plant is its unusual, but very colorful, flowers. A single plant, over the summer, can produce a prodigious

number of blossoms and seeds. These seeds will fling themselves everywhere when the capsules become ripe and dry.

Cleome can provide us with two good deer protection solutions. The first one is the stems and leaves have a foul, musty or mildew odor. If the smell is unpleasant for us, it may also be uncomfortable for a deer.

The other protection is the stems have small prickles or spines which deer will have difficulty chewing and provide us with sore fingers when handled.

## Dictamnus – Gas Plant



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***Dictamnus fraxinella*** – Here is a plant with a few other names such as ‘Fraxinella,’ ‘Dittany,’ ‘Lemon Bush,’ and ‘Burning Bush.’ The plant grows fast with tall spikes of *Alstroemeria*-like, deep rose pink or white

flowers with deep green veins. Brushing against the plant releases a strong lemon or citrus perfume. For us, the fragrance is heavenly, but to a deer, it smells-like-hell. These animals seem to hate citrus aromas!

One other fantastic feature about this perennial is the leaves produce a volatile oil (gas) that surrounds the plant and a lit match will ignite the gas into a flash of blue flame. That's the theory, but it never worked for me. I do not consider myself that desperate for engaging in "botanical pyromania" so I will not try it again. I'll enjoy that lemon perfume and those beautiful flowers instead. Deer should avoid being near this plant if they are smoking. Yes, I know... that's a really bad joke.

*Dictamnus* makes a good cut flower and is hardy from zones 3 to 9. A plant has the potential to grow to about three feet tall but will become bushy. Grow it in well-drained, fertile soil and full to partial sunlight.

Medical advisors issued a health warning concerning the handling of *Dictamnus* plants. The fragrant oils in the stems and leaves can cause a severe skin rash when exposed to sunlight in susceptible people. Wear gloves when you work around this plant.

Once planted and root-established, *Dictamnus* resents transplanting so make sure you know where you want it to grow. Just like Peonies, this plant can live for many years when not disturbed.

You can find plants in larger garden centers but also from online nurseries.

## **Eucalyptus**



***Eucalyptus cinerea*** – Are you ready to bring a “down under” look to your garden? Well, take a deep breath and plant these highly aromatic Australian shrubs. They have that unique fragrance we (especially children) can identify with when suffering from a cold or the flu. It is the primary ingredient for the medications to ease a sore throat, stuffy nose or a persistent cough.

This will not be a good reason for growing these plants. Let’s think in a more positive way for us to raise them. How about growing several to keep the deer at bay? They would have to bush against the stems and leaves to release the odor, but one whiff of the scent will have them on a quick “walkabout” away from your garden.

One species, nicknamed the **Silver Dollar Eucalyptus**, has rounded, silver dollar sized leaves attached around the stem. The leaves are a dull, silver gray, and the whole plant looks very different from other shrubs in a garden. You can dry the leafy stems and hang them from

branches of shrubs and trees to make a deer think twice about having lunch at that area.

This plant thrives in full sunlight, well-drained soil, and even neglect. You can also plant them into a large container or in the garden. Seeds and plants are available at many garden centers and in catalogs.

## **Filipendula – Meadowsweet or Queen of The Meadow**



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***Filipendula ulmaria*** – This is a magnificent prairie wildflower that can grow to over five feet tall. It produces fern-like deep green leaves with fluffy or foamy creamy white to pink flower spikes. Each flower is tiny, but each spike contains hundreds of them. They release a sweet, musk or earthy scent that changes from light to powerful depending on the

time of day or the weather. I guess you will need to camp outside in your garden for a few days to determine when that happens.

This perennial was an important cottage garden plant years ago before gardeners became terrified of tall-growing plants and retreated to growing only dwarf bedding flowers. It makes an excellent background plant for your garden conveying lightness, and airiness especially when you inhale the sweet but subdued perfume.

As expected, the flowers' scent causes deer to saunter away to find a more suitable cuisine. This species has a great potential of being an excellent barrier plant (discussed later) to protect your yummy interior plants.

Grow Meadowsweet in part shade and fertile soil. It is hardy from zones 3 to 9.

You may have trouble finding it in garden centers, but online wildflower specialty nurseries should have plants available.

## **Herb Plants**



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I incorporated the following plants – annuals and perennials – into this section. All provide strong leaf and stem fragrances most deer avoid. If the smell of the plants repulses them, then the taste of these herbs should do the trick in making them leave more quickly. However, there are always some rare exceptions for a few brave individuals may enjoy a culinary fling that includes sampling these plants.

Chances are they should spare your garden any onslaught if you plant the following herbs throughout your flower and vegetable gardens. One significant benefit of growing all these types of herbs is you can occasionally harvest the fresh leaves and stems to spice-up your meals.

Are you going to turn your garden into a display worthy of being at Scarborough Fair? Deer should avoid the area if you plant plenty of “**parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme,**” not to mention, **lavender,**

**basil, oregano** (unless the deer is from Italy), **dill** and whatever else you can find in your kitchen herb cabinet or drawer.

Other herbs, such as **Catnip** and **Catmint (*Nepeta*)** will also be of value in repelling them but, yes, you guessed it – it may attract the neighborhood kitty cats. Well, at least they will not eat your prized Hostas.

For better deer protection, try growing taller varieties of these plants. Deer can step over (or on) small plants if interested in moving to the more delicious-looking ones in the garden. You can also grow these herbs alongside those tasty plants to confuse and disappoint them from having a delicious meal.

## **Lantana**



***Lantana*** – I love this woody tropical shrub for its dazzling red, orange, pink and bright yellow flower clusters. My fault with it (with no real fault of its own making) is the slow growth with limited flowering for my area in the summer. In warm locations, having a longer growing season, this shrub will produce wondrous sights of being in constant bloom.

The foliage has a rather disagreeable herbal odor when handled. Deer will also take offense of this powerful smell and quickly visit other plants in the neighborhood.

For those of you living in warm climates, try to locate the taller and bushier growing varieties for they will grow closer to a deer’s nose.

## **Mentha – Mints**



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Never plant these herbs in the open ground for they will spread everywhere. You will spend a considerable amount of time and energy weeding them out of the soil. Plant them in containers so you can move them around where needed.

Many animals, especially deer, cattle, goats and horses, hate to come in contact with these highly aromatic groundcovers. Through the act of walking on them, the minty aroma will overwhelm the animals' sense of smell. If accidentally eaten, the taste of the plants will cause a violent spitting out of the offending meal.

On my father's farm, there was a large patch of spearmint growing in a pasture field of grass. How it grew there and for how long remains a mystery but that large minty patch was "off limits" by the hungriest of cows and my sister's goats. They avoided the area like their lives depended on it.

Walking through this patch produced a strong aroma of spearmint throughout the area, especially during the summer. For me, it was heavenly; for the cattle, goats, and, I assume, deer thought the patch stunk to high-heavens.

## **Monarda - Bee Balm**



***Monarda didyma*** – Related to the mint family, this very hardy perennial (zones 3 to 9) sports huge and colorful flower-heads. Deer will smell the foliage – which is strongly aromatic of mint or oranges – make a disgusted face (*they can!*) and quickly evacuate the area. Once again, some individuals may be adventurous and taste the plant but will not attempt that experiment again.

You can grow *Monarda* in partly shady to fully sunny areas but prefers the soil to be moist, not wet.

## **Nicotiana - Flowering Tobacco**



***Nicotiana alata and sylvestris*** – This popular annual combine at least two of the above qualities' deer find offensive. First, the white flowers emit a strong, sweet fragrance in the evenings and overnight – the time deer are most active. The perfume can overpower any sniffing nose and is pervasive in the cool, evening air. If we find the smell of tobacco smoke offensive, deer find these flowers just as stinky. Go figure.

The second quality is their large leaves being cumbersome to eat, and their flavor is horrible due to the toxic chemicals (such as nicotine) contained within them.

Varieties such as **Fragrant Cloud** and **Only the Lonely** can grow tall (over five feet) to form a barrier on the outskirts of a border.

You must know, these offensive qualities apply only to mature plants. Young plants can be on the midnight dining menu for they do not have the concentrations of repelling powerful toxins and are not in flower.

You would think the closely related Petunias would share these repulsion factors, but no, deer will nibble them to the ground.

## **Pelargonium – Bedding and Scented Geraniums**



***Pelargonium hybrida*** varieties – These plants have everything going for them – beautiful and showy flowers, and unusual leaf shapes. Like most other smelly plants, the leaves exude fragrance oils having degrees of pleasant to offending odors.

Our common bedding geraniums usually have less than pleasant herbal odors. Many of the scented geraniums have pleasant citrus, floral and minty aromas. These scented oils can stay on our fingers and nose for many hours. That can be “a good thing” under certain circumstances but embarrassing for other times.

When I had my nursery a few years ago, these plants fascinated my regular UPS driver. One day, he carried around a sprig of a rose-scented variety in his pocket. He did not realize he smelled like a rose everywhere he traveled. Much to his chagrin, his fellow drivers teased him concerning his “perfume.” He decided never to touch the plants again. Deer will also learn to avoid them once they rub their noses on the leaves.

The plants make great container subjects to place in areas where deer will zero-in on your valuable (and tasty) flower or vegetable plants. They grow best to their full potential when grown in open soil. They are hardy only to zones 9 to 10. Plant them in full sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil. Heights vary but snip them back to make them bushy. Many varieties are available in garden centers.

## **Salvia – Sage (Ornamental and Culinary)**



**Salvia** – Like the mints and the other herbs, these plants have fragrances that deer will find objectionable. Several species exude a delicious fruity aroma. You would think they would enjoy this fragrance but, surprisingly, avoid these plants. It may be the taste of the leaves that cause them to leave the area. Well, no matter, for these delightful plants provide you with an enjoyment of the leafy scents and stunning blossom colors.

A few *Salvia* species, such as the **Silver Sage** (*Salvia argentea*,) have abundant, furry, silver-white leaves. This coating is an excessive amount of ‘white fuzz’ trichomes. I will later describe similar plants having these excessive “wooly” leaves to help repel deer.

## Tagetes – Marigolds



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***Tagetes signata*** and ***erecta*** – When beginning my flower nursery several years ago, I, like many other nurseries selling bedding plants, offered tables full of Marigolds. I always had a difficult time selling these annual plants, not because of their colorful flowers, but because of the leaf odor. Most species and varieties have a characteristic smell many people, and, in this case, deer find horrible.

Not all Marigold species are terrible smelling. A few smaller growing species (or varieties) have laced or fern-like green leaves having a strong lemon or citrus fragrance when handled. These are the **Gem Series Marigolds** for they have small, single, bright yellow or orange petals covering the plant during most of the summer. Many people, including those who dislike most marigolds, enjoy the delicate nature of this species. Deer, though, can't stand the smell of these and the taller growing varieties called **African Marigolds** (*Tagetes erecta*.)

Plant these taller types where they can occasionally brush against the leaves to release the strong odor. You can add these taller varieties when forming colorful border-barriers to protect your valuable plants.

Plant all Marigolds in full to partial sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil.

## **Tanacetum – Costmary or Bible Leaf**



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*Tanacetum balsamita* or *Chrysanthemum balsamita* – Easily overlooked, this is a rather dull plant having large leaves, rarely flowers and sort of creeps along the ground. Okay, so what makes this unique plant repulse to deer? It's those leaves. They are bright green and intensely scented of spearmint when handled or disturbed.

The 'claim to fame' of this plant goes way back throughout history. Known to the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, barbarians and throughout the Middle Ages, they all called it **Costmary**.

Then the Puritans, in the 1600s, called it **Bible Leaf**. This name refers to its usage by parishioners as a bookmark. They would use the large leaves not only to mark a page in the Bible but also to use a leaf as a stimulant to wake themselves up during rather dull and endless sermons. I assume this intense minty aroma has the same surprising

effect on deer when they walk through (and quickly out of) a patch of these plants.

Costmary loves to grow in full sunlight to partial shade, adaptable to many soils and it is hardy to most growing zones. Can I get a hallelujah? It grows to about one foot tall and slowly spreads out along the ground.

To get this plant, locate specialty herb nurseries in your area or online.  
Amen.

## How about scented shrubs and trees?

Yes, there are several deer reportedly dislike, but, again, many factors contribute on how dependable they are in being real deterrents. One major problem is these types of plants take longer to grow large enough to become real contenders of being repulsive to deer.



Two shrubs have gained notoriety as being well-known in being deer-resistant. They are **Buxus - Boxwood** and **Buddleia - Butterfly Bush** (shown above).

These are two excellent examples of woody shrubs many gardeners report being excellent deer deterrents. Boxwood, based on several opinions (and probably the deer will agree), have vile-scented leaves smelling of stale cat urine. Okay, time to change the litter box. Who knows what these leaves taste like to a deer? I rather not know!

The Butterfly Bush flower spikes are far, far better in scent appreciation, but the deer seem to disagree. This shrub, as compared to the Buxus, is quicker to grow into an actual deer-repelling bush.

## These plants taste awful to deer.



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If a plant smells terrible, that's enough information for deer to avoid tasting it. It stinks so why bother eating it? What happens if the plant is scentless? The next action is to take a nibble and determine if that plant is tasty. Deer are like us when offered a new food item – they sample a small bite to test the taste. If it tastes good, let's eat more! If it is horrible, leave it alone.

Bad tasting plants usually contain toxic or poisonous chemicals. Sampling those leaves or flowers will not hurt the animal but ingesting greater amounts will cause health problems and, possibly, death. Mother Nature teaches them to avoid these types of vegetation. Fawn will also learn from their mothers' which plants not to eat.

The following plants may have sap containing dangerous toxins or nontoxic but bitter or “spicy hot” tasting chemicals in the leaves or stems. Deer can eat young leaves but will avoid older ones for they contain higher amounts of a nasty tasting chemical brew. Once tasted, they will not waste any time in vacating the area.

Several of these plants may contain recognizable or unknown toxins that will harm the health of deer, rabbits, cattle, horses, and, us when eaten. I must advise caution when growing them in your garden. They may be beautiful, but are also deadly.

## **Aconitum – Monkshood or Wolfsbane**



***Aconitum cammarum*** – Why is all the lovely flowering plants also the deadliest? Yes, look at those gorgeous blue-purple blossoms on this perennial called **Blue Lagoon**. Other varieties offer all shades of blue to white flowers. The common names vary from the blossom shape of a

medieval monk's hooded cloak to the sinister application of the plant's sap to kill wolves and other large carnivores to something as small as mice.

The key word is 'bane,' meaning, something that causes death or misery to something else. To prevent every herbivore from dropping dead all over our gardens, Mama Nature has the foresight to make this plant distasteful. It is so unpleasant that for most of recorded history accidental poisonings, via eating this plant, is very rare. One bite can make you wish you hadn't been foolish enough to take that bite. We can assume deer will agree and never sample this plant again.

## **Allium – Chives, Garlic, Onions, Ornamental Onion**



This large family of plants needs no explanation on why deer find them offensive. No matter which type of *Allium* you can plant – even those

delightful spring onions in the vegetable garden – they will decline to saunter amongst them in any garden. What happens if a deer takes a bite? Well, we can use our imagination based on how we react to the “hot” flavor.

**Chives** is a wonderful herb that not only imparts a subtle onion flavor to cuisine dishes but also has lovely blue to purple flower heads suitable for any flower bed in the early summer. Why not include scattered clumps of them in a vegetable garden?

The **Ornamental Flowering Onion** – *Allium giganteum* (shown above) makes a bold statement for the late spring to early summer flower border with large blue-purple to white globular flower clusters. Even the long, strap like leaves make an undeniable attraction.

**Garlic** is another matter, usually delegated to a “backstage” area of the vegetable garden, but can be an effective deterrent (and conversation item) to include in any flower garden, if only to ward off vampire deer.

## **Asclepias – Milkweed**



Another name for these perennial wildflowers is 'Butterfly Weed' which attracts many butterflies during the summer. Milkweed is vital for the survival of the Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) for it is the food source for their growing caterpillars.

As you might have already surmised, they are weeds, especially in agricultural areas. The plants are durable because of a thick taproot. If you damage a leaf or stem a milky white, liquid substance (called latex) oozes out which contains cardiac glycoside compounds poisonous to us and many grazing or browsing animals such as deer.

The only creatures that suffer no ill effects of eating these plants are insects. Birds can become sick if they eat Monarch caterpillars. Most will vomit the caterpillar and learn never to eat them again. Fawn will avoid these plants on the first nibble.

All milkweeds thrive in as much sunlight as possible. They are hardy from zones 3 to 9, and mature plants can grow to over three feet tall

and wide.

There are many species of Milkweed you can plant – some being hardy natives while others are the tender, but highly colorful, tropical varieties. Be sure to grow a few plants in your garden if only for the sake of the butterflies.

## Brugmansia and Datura



Although being of different genera, these tender plants are related to each other. Gardeners love them because they make their beds and borders have “a tropical look.” Yes, their flowers are stunningly beautiful but the entire plant, from leaves to seeds, is highly toxic if eaten.

Nicknamed “Angel’s Trumpets,” **Brugmansia** (shown above) have their large, yellow to orangish-red blossoms hang downward from the tree-

like shrub.



A related plant, called **Datura** (shown above) grows smaller and project their beautiful trumpet-like, white, yellow to purple flowers upward from the ground. As you may have guessed, many gardeners call them “Devils’ Trumpets.”

These plants contain highly toxic chemicals fatal in high concentrations but are beneficial to ease certain diseases at diluted levels. You cannot get poisoned by eating a few leaves – according to brave (but self-described “stupid”) volunteers who chewed a leaf or two. The taste is overwhelmingly sickening, and most deer will agree. If they nibble a bite, they will refuse another one! The plants’ musty smell is also disturbing to cause deer (and many non-gardeners) to bypass them in a garden.

Never plant these flowers in a vegetable garden and keep the seed pods away from children!

## Convallaria – Lily-of-the-Valley



***Convallaria majalis*** – I have encountered many large colonies of this highly fragrant, spring-blooming perennial and never seen a leaf chewed off or plants crushed by the weight of deer hooves. They know something we don't. Like all other plants in this section, *Convallaria* may have a ghastly flavor preventing deer and rabbits from gorging themselves. It's a good thing, for it contains several toxins that can quickly stop a mammalian heart.

In between those constant slowed-down heartbeats, the leaves also contain soap-like substances called saponins (see *Saponaria* described later) that can give you a massive stomach and intestinal ache. Your heart (and one of a deer) will probably stop before the pain gets too intense. Goodness gracious, gardening can be a scary place to enjoy yourself!

Many garden centers offer bare root “pips” or shoots of this plant in the spring. Plant as many as you can for many years of enjoyment.

## Dicentra – Old-Fashioned Bleeding Heart



***Dicentra spectabilis* or *Lamprocapnos spectabilis*** – Once known as *Dicentra* (and still is with us diehard gardeners,) botanists now classify this outstanding spring-blooming, hardy perennial, as *Lamprocapnos*. I’m sorry, but this name sounds like a newly discovered dinosaur fossil or a comical beast straight out of a Dr. Seuss book. No, I will stick with the old name.

Are these beautiful plants with those delightfully dangling “broken heart” flowers poisonous? Yes, sad to say, but so are many other favorite spring blooming plants.

It is a close relative to the Poppy – who knew? That surprised me when researching for what makes this such a toxic plant for deer and every other animal, including us. The main reason for being so toxic is it contains isoquinoline alkaloids. Even the name sounds terrible, and you don't want to see its chemical molecular structure for it will bring back bad memories of High School chemistry class.

Without going into a significant examination of what ill-effects it can do to an animal, let's agree the plant is down-right dangerous to eat. There have been plenty of unfortunate reports of cats and dogs dying from ingesting only a small amount of leaves or flowers. Reports of deer killed by eating this plant are nonexistent, but Mother Nature seems to tell them to leave this plant (and others) alone.

## **Digitalis – Foxglove**



For many people with a heart condition, the prescription drug of digitalis is a lifesaver. Drug companies derive this drug (refined and called Digoxin) from this beautiful, towering, hardy biennial-perennial plant.

Eating any part of the plant is extremely dangerous since the “raw” digitalis compound will overstimulate the heart muscles and cause death. If this happens to us, it will happen to deer. The plant must taste terrible, and they quickly learn to avoid it.

Never allow growing this plant in or near a vegetable garden; delegate its planting on the outskirts of a border or in the center of a perennial flower bed.

## **Euphorbia – Spurge**



Like the *Asclepias* or Milkweed plants, these beautiful and hardy perennials contain milky white sap that gushes out of the leaves and stems when injured. I suspect this sap also includes the same “make us horribly sick” chemical concoctions that milkweed contains – and probably comprises some other poisons for good measure to make anyone and anything (like deer and rabbits) seriously ill.

As usual, Mother Nature makes the sap bad-tasting, so after one bite they would be crazy to nibble more. I have yet to encounter an insane deer or rabbit.

For your reference, avoid handling these plants for this sap can severely irritate your skin. When planting these in your flower garden always wear gloves.

## **Helenium – Sneezeweed or Helen’s Flower**



***Helenium autumnale*** – These flamboyant hybrid members of the Daisy Family (Asteraceae) have brilliant shades of yellow, orange and red petals with large, knobby flower-heads or cones. Hardy from zones 3 to 9, this perennial produce spreading clumps and blooms all summer and into the fall.

Native to North America, European breeders has recently created several outstanding colorful hybrid varieties. Most plants can grow to over four feet tall within two years.

Before I mention why deer find this plant objectionable, let's take a historical side trip into this plant's common nicknames. Sneezeweed does not mean it will cause allergies but has a strange association with the old snuff nasal powders. Made by pulverized or crushed dried leaves and flowers, this powder was for quick-inhaling into the nose. It sounds like a precursor to sniffing powdered cocaine. The point was to create a sudden strong sneeze to force out evil spirits. This socially acceptable action was what the upper-class snobs did long ago. They must have had a severe head-full of evil spirits back then.

The other common name, "Helen's Flower," botanists regard as a Greek tribute to Helen of Troy. It would be more fitting if this were a native Greek plant but, again, this plant is native to North America. If your name is Helen living in Troy, Michigan or any of the cities and towns named Troy in the United States and Canada, someone named this beautiful plant after you! Well, not really – but it's worth a try in being famous.

Okay, let's go back to the main subject of deer-resistant plants and flowers. Wouldn't it be amazing if this plant made deer sneeze uncontrollably and frighten them away from your garden? That conjures up vivid imagery but this is not the case. The real reason is this plant contains concentrated toxic chemicals harmful to deer and rabbits if they overeat the foliage. A word of warning though, for the plant, when handled, can cause an allergic skin reaction in susceptible people.

Since this plant is not on the favorites list of delectable food plants for deer, you can use it, if grown in quantity, to form a very colorful barrier, discussed later.

## Hellebore – Lenten Rose



*Helleborus orientalis* or *Helleborus x hybridus* – While we look outside from our warm homes to a snow-covered garden, bleak with no apparent signs of spring, what we can't observe is what is happening under the snowpack. This perennial (zones 4 to 9) is slowly inching its stems and blossoms up out of the snow. It has evergreen leaves, and some remain – worse for wear – during the winter, but fresh new leaves will also slowly emerge.

Its common name is Lenten Rose and is a member of the Buttercup family and not to the Rose family. Lenten is also a reference to the Christian season of Lent. It is during this time when this plant blooms –

give or take a week or two. While most Northern Hemisphere garden plants are dormant, this one springs to life even in January and continues to grow and bloom into May.

Now, wouldn't this plant be an excellent meal for a starving deer? Well, I guess one will sample anything to survive, but this plant could make the unfortunate animal seriously ill. I am not sure how it will affect them but, for humans, eating the plants (and roots) will cause uncontrollable diarrhea (being a strong purgative), vomiting and ill-regular heartbeat rhythms. Strange, but true (and sad), many years ago, parents forced children to eat these plants to help expel stomach and intestinal worms. The children that didn't die became worm-free.

## **Narcissus – Daffodils**



Their beauty inspired William Wordsworth to compose a memorable poem when he saw a host of golden daffodils swaying in a breeze. What

he may not have known was the whole plant is poisonous with alkaloids and other nasty “oids” and “amines”. The main culprit for accidental poisonings is eating the bulbs. Throughout history, people have confused Daffodil bulbs with onion bulbs. Although not life-threatening, eating a bulb will cause massive stomach distress lasting for a few days.

Deer are not digging up bulbs to gnaw on but eating the leaves, stems, and flowers can cause them to experience super-duper tummy aches. Yes, that can happen, but I suspect once they take a bite of the plant the taste is probably sickening and they consume no more. Also, if they take a mouthful, and tolerate the flavor, the sticky, mucilaginous gel of the sap is enough to make any deer gag-like-mad. I wonder how Mr. Wordsworth would have composed a poem about that!

The next time you pick a daffodil, feel the exuded thickened sap at the injured end of the stem. Now, imagine what that would feel like in your mouth. Enough said, wouldn't you agree?

## **Papaver – Poppy**



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***Papaver somniferum***, the ornamental Opium Poppy, is the main culprit of being poisonous to deer and us. Derived from the seed capsule sap is the drug called morphine. This plant produces a white latex substance in their stems, leaves and seed pods which contain this hazardous compound.

Like all other toxic plants listed in this section, the flavor of the plant must be bitter and unpalatable to deer. The latex must feel like liquid glue in their mouth.

The other poppy species also contribute several harmful substances (including isoquinoline alkaloids also found in Bleeding Heart plants), but the ornamental Opium Poppy is what deer usually avoid when encountered in flower beds. Unlike Dorothy in "*The Wizard of Oz*", they will not fall asleep – but later drop dead if they eat too many of these colorful plants.

## Tropaeolum – Nasturtium



Now, let's concentrate on a colorful plant that is not poisonous but may not be edible to deer. The keywords of "may not be" is important for some deer may enjoy the flavor of the flowers and leaves of this plant. All parts of the plant are edible. Most Nasturtium flowers and leaves have a sweet but hot-peppery-tangy flavor and stringent odor. The fragrance and taste are delightful yet questionable.

*In her book, **The Fragrant Path**, Louise Beebe Wilder writes, "The name Nasturtium, an old Latin word used by Pliny, was derived by him from narsus, the nose, and tortus, twisted, in reference to the supposed contortions of the nose caused by the hot, pungent odor and taste of these flowers." If your deer can read, you can always add a small sign in your garden stating Ms. Wilder's words as a friendly warning to them.*

Nasturtiums need to grow in full to part sunlight. Avoid making the soil too fertile for it will make the plants produce more vegetation instead of flowers. Feel free to grow these plants in your vegetable garden to help confuse (and frustrate) any hungry deer. For us, the flowers make a fantastic, colorful addition to salads.

## **Saponaria – Bouncing Bet, Soapwort**



***Saponaria officinalis*** – Never mentioned, this is a great deer deterrent perennial plant for a garden. A European wildflower, it has a muddled history as far back to Medieval days or even earlier. Related to the Dianthus or carnation family, it is a terrific bloomer from mid to late summer until a killing frost. Clustered together, the single or double flowers are rosy pink or snow white and have an incredible grape soda or Concord grape perfume.

Another fascinating feature is the leaves form soapsuds when you crush and rub them with your hands in water. The Latin name of 'Saponaria' means 'relating to soap' or 'soap making.' Museums did (and some still do) use the leaves to produce soap suds for washing delicate or irreplaceable fabric material. If you need a quick hand-wash pluck a few leaves, crunch them up, add a little water and presto – instant hand soap.

It tolerates dry soil conditions and has few if any, insect, rabbit, deer or disease problems. No wonder, for the bugs, bunnies, and deer do not want soapsuds in their mouths! Care to suckle on a bar of soap for a few minutes? Neither do the deer! Off they go to find something – anything – to get the taste of soap out of their mouth.

The plants slowly spread and grow to over two feet tall, thriving in the sunshine to partial shade, and fertile, well-drained soil. They are exceptionally hardy from zones 3 to 9.

Saponaria still keeps its wildflower heritage by being invasive, but not too aggressive, and controlled by the downward thrust of a sharp spade. Yes, that sounds horrible, but sometimes we have to practice 'tough love' on some overactive plants.

A recommended variety (which is the species only dressed-up) has double-petaled white flowers. It is sterile and propagated by cuttings. The magnified grape fragrance is because of the extra set of petals. It is rare to find. Overall, it is a plant worth finding, growing and enjoying!

There are many other plants in our garden that contain potentially fatal cocktails of toxic compounds and elixirs. Something within their sap is potentially deadly, and Mother Nature makes sure it tastes horrible, so deer will move on to find something delicious and nutritional.

What about the numerous non-poisonous plants deer could eat instead? Well, Mother Nature has other surprises in store for these hungry herbivores...

## These plants feel awful in a deer's mouth.



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If the flavor of a garden plant is acceptable (and is probably safe from toxins), it may have another method to prevent deer from eating it. To provide a show-and-tell demonstration, find velvet or cashmere material, stuff it into your mouth and chew. Are you making a strange, repulsive look on your face? Why are you spitting out the material? Yes, deer will do the same – well, maybe not the comical, disgusting look.

Several plants can produce gritty, furry, hairy or fuzzy white or gray foliage. The epidermis of each leaf has coarse particles or extensions called trichomes which aid in preventing excessive moisture loss (especially in dry climates) but also act as barriers to prevent insects

and herbivores (like deer) from eating the leaves. For a deer, the feel of these particles or trichomes is unpleasant and may “gum-up” their mouth or act as abrasives on their teeth. Care to eat a sheet of sandpaper? Ooh, that thought gives me a cold chill down my spine!

The following garden plants provide material on their leaves that make them repulsive to many herbivores. Once again, this is subjective for starving deer will eat whatever they can find, especially if the plant is nonpoisonous for them.

Let’s begin with popular representatives of garden plants with velvety or furry, usually silvery white or gray leaves. These leaves may have smelly properties that deer also find offense, giving the plant an extra layer of protection from being devoured.

## **Senecio – Dusty Miller**



***Senecio cineraria*** – This plant is the ever-popular annual grown for its bright, silvery-white leaves. Depending on the variety, the appearance of these leaves ranges from being “whole” to lacey which adds stunning contrast to other colorful annuals and perennials grown in the garden.

Dusty Miller also makes a great display grown in a container and placed to highlight dull, partly shady areas. Most of the varieties grow only to less than two feet tall but can be bushy. From many accounts, deer seem to avoid this plant – possibly by learning to avoid any bright white plants.

## **Stachys – Lamb’s Ears**



***Stachys byzantina*** – For lovers of fuzzy-wuzzy, woolly, silvery-white leafed perennials or baby sheep, you can’t go wrong in adding this plant to a garden. I am not sure if lambs and adult sheep or goats will eat this plant, but deer tend to avoid it. It makes a great container or border

edging subject. Make sure the soil is well-drained for constant wet soil will kill this plant.

The next group of garden plants have regular green leaves – some with attractive variegated or white-spotted foliage – but have small, hardened trichomes. You may not notice them on the foliage, but your fingers can feel them. Each leaf, depending on the species, will have either a slight roughness or coarseness. Either way, most deer dislike this unusual feeling in their mouth.

## **Brunnera – Siberian Bugloss and Pulmonaria – Lungwort**



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***Brunnera macrophylla*** – These plants are hardy perennials and ideal candidates for your shade garden. Most varieties have green leaves, but

a popular variety called **Jack Frost** (shown above) is silvery-white with green veins. However, to deer, the leaves feel “weird” in their mouth. Each older leaf has a multitude of tiny, fuzzy, trichomes giving a characteristic roughness.

The common name of “bugloss” is Greek and is a reference to the shape and roughness of an ox tongue. Okay, we will accept this without having to visit a farm and have the cows lick our hands. Yes – cows have rough-feeling tongues; just like a cat’s tongue!



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***Pulmonaria officinalis*** has scratchy, mottled foliage spotted with white (once referred to looking like a diseased lung) while the flowers are pink to red and purple. Their leaves also have a roughness which deer dislike.

**Echinacea – Coneflower; Helianthus – Sunflowers; Heliotrope; Rudbeckia – Black-Eyed Susan, and Zinnia**



Instead of being constantly repetitive in their descriptions, and to keep you from dozing off, the leaves of each of these plants are rough-textured – like that of fine-grade sandpaper. This protection is to keep chewing insects at bay, but also works wonders keeping the larger-mouthed critters away.

The only problem with this protection plan is the young, developing leaves are pliable, and the trichomes are soft. Any developing leaves and stems are at risk of being devoured, especially on individual small plants. If larger groups of these plants are growing, a deer will have a difficult time nibbling off all this tender foliage.

Coneflower and Heliotrope also have an advantage for deer dislike their fragrant flowers.

## **Equisetum – Horsetail, Scouring-Rush**



*Equisetum hyemale* and *Equisetum arvense* (Common Horsetail) – Now, if you want to grow something different which deer will need extensive dental work after eating, this plant is for you. Botanists consider *Equisetum* “primitive plants” for they reproduce by spores and have tiny, non-functional, rudimentary leaves wrapped around the joints of ribbed, dark green stems. These hollow, rigid stems can grow to nearly three feet tall and contain silica crystals or microscopic sand particles. They have the consistency and scratchiness of coarse grade sandpaper.

The Common Horsetail has many side-branching stems which the early pioneers thought of as resembling the tail of a horse. Both species

stems are so abrasive the pioneers used bunches to clean (as in scouring) pots and pans.

Although being primitive perennial plants, they can quickly spread by underground runners in wet, fertile soil in partly shady areas, so it is best to plant them in large containers.

These plants are hardy and grow in wetlands near the Arctic Circle to warmer climates of Europe and North America.

## **Fibrous and thorny plants deer have difficulty eating.**

You will always find deer-damaged plants in your garden. They will nip-off branches or shoots to sample the taste and feel of a plant. As with the above difficult-to-eat vegetation, other plants have leathery or tough, fibrous or thorny stems and leaves providing difficulties in eating.

I suppose it is like having a large wad of chewing gum in your mouth. You keep chewing but nothing “breaks down” and cannot swallow it. I have seen goats chewing on a plant and later violently spit out the repulsive, masticated wad of “veggie-gum.” Even these animals can sense something-is-not-right and will avoid the possibility of choking.

More protective plants produce prickly or sharp needle-like stems and leaves painful for the tongue and palate. Many deer eat rose bushes (they love them!) but are selective in nibbling only the soft, young growth while the thorns are flexible and not sharp. They usually avoid older and thornier rose canes but will carefully nibble off the young leaves.



Many plants, such as **Ferns**, **Begonias**, **Peonies**, **Bearded Iris**, **Yucca**, and **Viburnum** create difficulties for deer to eat. These leaves have tough tissues or stringy fibers. The beautiful annual, ***Helichrysum bracteatum*** lives up to the common name of **Everlasting Flowers** or **Strawflowers** (shown above.) A deer has to encounter the unpalatable dryness and crunchiness of the flowers.



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***Pachysandra terminalis*** or **Japanese Pachysandra**, shown above, is always a favorite groundcover plant with evergreen foliage. There are reports that deer appear to taste the leaves but after a short time lose interest. Bad taste? No taste? Possibly, but the leaves may offer difficulty in chewing.

Deer do not have the luxury of experiencing casual dining; their style is of 'fast food'. Standing around a patch of this groundcover and continuously chewing on a single mouthful of these leaves wastes time and energy. Time would be better spent at finding more nutritious and easier to eat plants.

This plant makes an excellent barrier (see the next section) if grown in wide swaths around a flower bed or border.



***Opuntia humifusa*** or **Prickly Pear Cactus** has spiny pads which need careful manipulation. A deer will have to by-pass their sensitive nose from these sharp needles, then encounter the mouth, tongue, and throat. Ugh! I have a difficult time thinking (and typing) that sentence. I do not understand how they do it, but they can nibble this and other cacti. I suspect they do this carefully (well, they better do so) but again, cacti are not 'fast-food.' Starving deer will attempt to eat any plant, even those with thorns.

Should you grow this very hardy cactus in your garden? Well, it is unique and beautiful (especially for many of us not living in a desert), but look at those vicious needles! Have children at home or in the neighborhood? Pets? I would reconsider if you plan to grow it.



There are other less-hazardous spiny perennials available that can help deter deer. *Acanthus* or **Bear's Breeches**; *Echinops* – **Globe Thistle** and *Eryngium* – **Sea Holly** (shown above) have spiny leaves, flowers and stems. They can also act as attractive barriers (described next) to help deflect deer from not only eating but advancing into your border or flower bed.

## Defensive beauty using natural barriers.



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Deer can step or jump over any undesirable plants. One practical method of preventing this is to build very tall enclosures to protect your vegetable garden. Your green beans and lettuce plants will appreciate this strong protection but how about flower gardens? Having perimeter barriers which mimic a razor-wire prison fence will not look attractive with your prized perennials.

Here, we have a perplexing problem. How can we incorporate a barrier around a flower bed or border and still have everything look beautiful? We can use the following list of short and tall growing plants and flowers to create a “confusion” wall for deer. A natural barrier of

different tiers of defense is functional but can also look attractive. Instead of pounding wooden posts in the ground and stringing chicken or barbed wire, try incorporating the following tall growing, and bushy plants.

How about adding larger stones spaced close together on the periphery of the bed or border? Think of it as a large-scale semi-rock garden. Deer are hesitant walking on uneven and coarse surfaces.

The best enclosures offer tall-growing plants that contain a variety of the above-mentioned deer-resistant plants. The outermost plantings should use smelly leafed plants which give deer a hesitation to move forward into a garden.

The plants listed below offer these “unlikable” features that should limit a deer’s access to your flower and vegetable gardens. If these don’t work – then it’s time to erect tall wooden or wire-based structures.

## **Anthemis – Roman Chamomile**



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***Anthemis nobilis*** or ***Chamaemelum nobile*** – Let's begin this section on barriers from the ground up. Instead of height, how about an extensive ground cover? Wait! A barrier for deer to walk on as a deterrent? That sounds like the opposite of what we are trying to accomplish. Yes, they will walk on this lawn but will eventually realize it is not enjoyable. They may be repulsed by this extensive aromatic carpet.

Also called Creeping Chamomile, this very hardy, zones 4 to 9 plant grew as a lawn before the use of grass was considered more practical. These hardy plants are short-growing and will spread outward when occasionally mowed or clipped back when they grow too tall – especially when they bloom with daisy-like flowers. When properly controlled, the extensively spreading mat will smother weedy plants.

The main reason deer dislike this plant is, when walked on, the fern-like leaves release a strong aroma of apples. This scent, pleasant for us, is proven by numerous observations to confuse and repel deer. Is it the strong odor of ripe apples that deer find repulsive – or it is the taste of the plants? This observation presents us with a conundrum for deer relish the smell and taste of apples! They will search high and low for apple trees to nibble on new growth and ripe apples. One primary reason for this confusing contradiction is apples, from trees, have a weaker scent as compared to this groundcover. The smell of Chamomile may overload their sense of smell.

Now, mind you, a few plants will not do the trick in ridding deer from your garden. Planting wide rows around a garden will give them pause when continuing forward. Here's a thought – if you live in mild winter locations and are constructing or plan to reorganize a border or several beds, why not substitute a grassy lawn with this evergreen groundcover?

Think of all the possibilities of creating this scented lawn! You have only a few times to mow and enjoy the heavenly apple-scent while walking on it. As for the deer, they will be happily rummaging around and within your neighbor's flower and vegetable gardens. If they should decide to go forward into your bed or border, they will encounter the following plants.

## **Artemisia – Sweet Annie**



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***Artemisia annua*** – This annual plant has the potential to grow to over five feet tall and slightly less wide. Unlike the popular smaller growing, silvery-leaf varieties, this species produces towers of green, fern-like fronds later populated with small yellow blossoms in the summer. The whole plant is sweetly herbal scented – strong enough to repel deer (and some people). These fronds are famous for scented craft making, especially in wreath construction.

The major problem with this plant is its excessive re-seeding. Once you grow it (and produces seeds) you will have years of self-seeded plants popping up everywhere in your gardens each spring.

If you can grow this plant in areas where you know deer are prone to enter your lawn or garden this can be a useful deterrent, but otherwise I suggest leaving it out of your garden. It can be more of a significant pest than the deer!

## Artichoke – Globe Artichoke



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***Cynara cardunculus var. scolymus*** – If you live in zones 7 to 10, this plant will be at home in your permaculture vegetable garden or in a perennial border. Sounds confusing, I know, but Artichokes are famous for their large flower buds. These buds, when properly prepared (which I have yet to grasp the proper technique) are a delicacy.

To a deer, the plants and buds are a little too thorny to eat. This plant is actually a large thistle. Deer and thistles do not get along well. Well, I don't like them either. Have you ever grasped a thistle plant while weeding – with or without gloves? Enough said.

This plant can grow tall – to over five or six feet and about half as wide. If you line enough plants in a row to help partition off a vegetable or

flower garden, it can help to repel deer. To them, trying to eat the tough, fibrous, and spiny foliage and buds is too much of a hassle.

Although being an annual in colder growing zones, it can grow slowly from seeds sown early in spring. They may not be towering as perennial-grown plants, but they produce those big, thickened flower buds for harvesting in late summer to fall.

## **Asparagus**



***Asparagus officinalis*** – Best known for its delicious new-growth spears in spring, this is another epicurean, permaculture vegetable garden plant. Hardy from zones 3 to 10, it can also be a delicacy for deer. It is one of those “gray-area” plants deer will find repulsive or enjoyable.

The good news is that deer avoid mature Asparagus plants, and you can form a living fence to keep these critters out of the veggie and flower garden. Yes, those tall growing shoots (up to nine feet) form extensive fern-like frond growth producing a well-grown green barrier. Even throughout the fall and winter, the large bushes will continue to serve as a fence, but by this time the stems are brown and dead.

You can grow this plant all along a garden in a wide row. Think about Asparagus as a multipurpose planting – harvest new shoots in the spring for a delicacy and later let some shoots grow tall and wide to distract the deer from entering your gardens. You can grow this plant from seed but will take over three years to become tall.

Asparagus are dioicous – forming separate male and female plants. If grown from seed, you will have both sexes available. If you do not want future self-seedings of new plants, you can purchase, in garden centers, roots of male plants which grow faster. Buying these roots can be expensive if you need several to plant in long rows. Don't harvest the new spring shoots for three years so you can make the plants grow tall and fuller in width.

## **Ornamental Grass**



Oh dear, where do I begin in describing all the various species and varieties you can purchase in garden centers and online nurseries? There is your common **Fescue** grass to **Pampas**, **Fountain**, **Lemongrass**, **Reeds**, **Sedges**, and many other blade waving wonders.

The main thing to find and grow is tall varieties and species. Deer dislike tall grass for it may hide potential predators lurking within, or around the clumps. Think of tigers lurking about in tall grass in India. Deer could leap through the grass but what is on the other side? An enemy or a cliff? From their perspective, it's better to avoid interacting with these plants.

Deer prefer not to eat grass but will consume it if no other plants are readily available. For them, all grass is difficult to digest, lacks vital nutrition and energy, and is probably unappetizing. It would be like us eating bland rice cakes instead of bowls of mixed salad greens.

It is overwhelming for me to include in this ebook all the tall grass varieties you can grow near your flower and vegetable gardens. My best recommendation is to contact your local garden centers and discuss which tall-growing grass are hardy for your area. Many varieties provide gorgeous displays almost year-round. Their only maintenance is to cut back (or safely burn-off) the dead blades in late winter or early spring to allow the new growth access to sunlight.

# Vines to grow on a fence to keep deer out.

If your deer problems escalate that you need to install a partial to entirely enclosed fence, it does not have to appear ugly – you can train up colorful climbing vines. Again, it depends on the vine for deer consider many to be delicious. One group of deer may love to eat these vines while others turn-their-nose up at them. This game of choosing the correct plant to train up and throughout a fence can become perplexing.

## Clematis



While researching for this ebook which plants deer dislike eating, Clematis always provided conflicting accounts from gardeners. Several

reports from different Universities could not agree on their assessments of Clematis being a deer attractor or deterrent. Oh well, let's throw caution to the wind (or, in this case, deer) and plant these beautiful and hardy vines on a fence and hope for the best.

With all the multitude of species and varieties available to us, it is impossible to choose which type will keep them at bay. Varieties having a slight scent, from what we learned earlier, may repel them. One dominant theory is the leaves are difficult to eat or possibly have some toxicity. I am shrugging my shoulders in indecision on what to advise you on what to grow.

Whatever strikes your fancy (and growing zone) plant a few of these vines up a fence and later determine if your deer love them (as a salad) as much as you do (for the flowers).

## **Gelsemium**



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***Gelsemium sempervirens*** – The **Carolina Yellow Jessamine** is a native climbing or rambling vine to the southern areas of the United States to Central America. Most forms of this vine are only hardy to zones 7 and higher. It is easy to grow in full sunlight and most types of soils plus withstand high heat and humidity.

The beautiful buttercup-yellow 'funnel' or trumpet-shaped flowers bloom in early spring and continues well into summer. You can even get a few blooms in the fall. The stems will twine around any object and can tower to 12 feet if not cut back. They will also grow-like-mad as a groundcover.

The entire plant is very poisonous (even the pollen) containing hazardous levels of strychnine and other alkaloids. Deer and rabbits quickly learn to leave this plant alone for it will give them a severe gastric upset – even when consuming a small amount of the plant.

Although making an excellent, colorful and fragrant vine for any garden fence, a good idea is don't grow it if you have children and pets.

## **Lonicera – Honeysuckle**



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***Lonicera sempervirens*** – If you find space, plant the variety called **Major Wheeler** (and other related Honeysuckle varieties) in your garden. This one has a reddish-orange to pure red, skinny, tubular flowers. It is a powerhouse bloomer, and if you live in North America, the flowers will attract all the hummingbirds in the neighborhood.

Deer couldn't care less about it. They may sample a leaf or two but the novelty quickly subsides, and they move on to other plants. The reasons may be the leaves have a bad taste or are difficult to eat.

This vine can grow upward to over 10 feet tall but spreads outward, so make sure it grows on a very sturdy fence. It is tolerant of partial shade and flowers non-stop from early to late summer.

Many gardening authorities feel this is the best honeysuckle for a gardener since it easy to take care of, is very hardy (zone 4) and

resistant to many plant diseases. You know it is popular when it is always being sold out in garden centers!

There is a slew of other very colorful honeysuckles for your garden. A visit to your larger garden centers will have them available.

A common Honeysuckle – but invasive in many areas – is **Hall's Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*)**. It also appears to be an unattractive dinner item for deer, but this plant is highly aggressive in growth and can overwhelm a garden, even if grown on a fence.

# Understanding deer habits and behaviors.



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Deer love to eat Hostas, Daylilies, Roses, Hydrangeas, Lilies, and Tulips to name a few examples of popular garden plants. They also enjoy eating many young shrubs and trees. They may not kill these plants but will severely stunt their growth or weaken them to be susceptible to disease or unable to survive the winter.

Male deer (called bucks), during the Fall mating season, will severely damage young trees (always the expensive and rare ones) by excessively scraping the tender trunk bark and side branches with their antlers. That is always a teary-eyed surprise seeing the mangled, woody mess.

The vegetable garden is also the place for them to sample sweet corn, green beans, lettuce, and sweet potato vines. The feeding frenzy seems to occur a day before you expect to harvest the crops.

Biologists have identified these and other facts listed below concerning deer behavior:

- They get most of their water requirements from browsing lush vegetation with high water content. Most of the time, they are far from bodies of water such as streams, rivers, ponds or lakes to drink water.
- Why are deer attracted to our garden plants? They like to sample “unusual” plants unknown in the wild. These plants also contain higher amounts of vital nutrients and minerals for better health.
- They appear to have an innate attraction to plants with higher protein content such as green beans, garden peas, cabbage, and several flowering plants. All deer have an attraction to plants having higher levels of carbohydrates. New shoots and leaves are more delicious and have no or low levels of toxicity. They are also easier to eat than older leaves. They also seek fruit, such as berries and apples.
- Gardens are more open-areas which allow them to observe their surroundings better. Woodland settings offer limited visibility while gardens and lawns show unobstructed views of potential predators possibly lurking nearby or at a distance.
- They are nocturnal animals; more active in late evenings and early mornings. While we sleep, they are visiting the all-night dining experience in our gardens. Dew drops on leaves help to supply deer with additional water.
- Their senses of smell and hearing are acute; they quickly learn which scents and sounds are safe from those that are alarming. For additional deterrents, place highly scented items throughout your gardens such as soap bars and cheap, opened perfume bottles. For frightening sounds, leave a radio turned on to an all-night talk-radio station.

Instrumental music may not be adequate to scare them away, but vocalizations usually will. Make sure your neighbors do not hear the radio; otherwise the police sirens and lights arriving at your house will definitely scare the deer away.

- Can deer see color? For a long time, biologists assumed they were colorblind. Well, they are for red-green colorblindness. For them, red next to green turns gray. According to many research reports, they see blue better than we can! Green, to them, is shades of yellow. They can't see "true" yellow too well but not orange or red. So, in their world, they see all shades of blue and yellow – everything else is gray. It's possible they may not recognize profoundly variegated plants as being plants!
- They see well at night, especially in the moonlight, but hanging shiny objects that shake, rattle and roll (and contribute a cacophony of unpleasant sounds) will give these animals pause in venturing further in your garden. My father used to hang aluminum pie pans on strings from tree branches. The slightest breeze would rattle the pans when they struck each other but also flash reflected moonlight. Every few days he would change the locations of them so the deer would not get wise to the "prank."
- Have a few scary Halloween decorations that move or emit sounds? Can you install a motion detection sensor that immediately turns on a few lights or an alarm when a doe or buck passes by the garden? The trouble is a passing neighborhood tomcat, or a stray dog (and even high winds) will also set off the lights or alarm depending on its sensitivity.

## **Deter deer by attracting them away from your garden.**

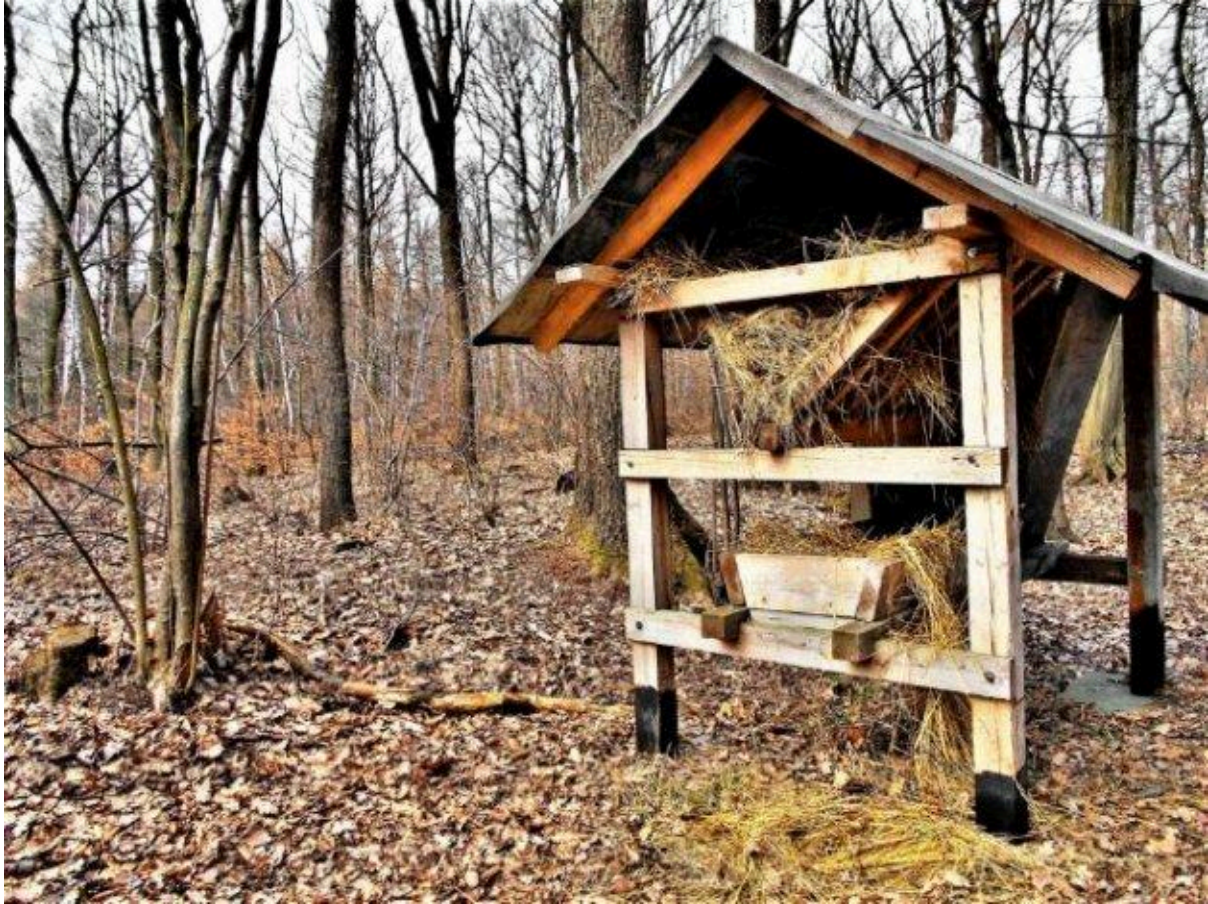
There are no honest-to-goodness bona fide deer-deterrent plants; even plastic ones are partially bitten off according to many observations by surprised gardeners. If they are under stress from being unable to find nutritious plants, they will resort to eating less than ideal ones.

Can we blame them for trying to survive when times are tough? Absolutely not! Having them eat potentially fatal plants that can contribute to their weakened health or possible death is unsettling. Talk about conflicting interests and expectations!

What can we do to save our expensive garden plantings from the pillaging and pilfering of marauding hungry deer? We wish they can have something nutritious to eat ... somewhere else.

There are reports of gardeners (gleaned from Internet forums) who have had surprising success in creating buffer-zone beds or plots of delicious veggie-goodies near or inside woodland areas. The idea is for deer to eat to their heart's content there instead of venturing into our flower beds or borders. If they cross over to these areas, they will encounter some distasteful plants listed earlier. Smart deer will figure out not to waste time here but go back to where the food is outstanding – and remain there. In theory, this plan should work, and some gardeners swear it does.

To enact this plan, grow extensive plantings near a woodland as a separation between your regular gardens. Plant whatever they are fond of such as intermixed sowings of nutritious alfalfa, green peas, Lupine, green beans, soybeans, and lettuce. Also, plant their perennial comfort-food of cheap Hosta, daylily and rose plants.



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One idea, to supplement these plantings, is to include self-serve “trail-mix” stations where containers filled with grains (such as field corn, wheat, and oats) become mixed with a sugary solution of molasses. Agricultural supply stores will carry large goody-bags of this mixture made for pampered horses.

These stations do not have to be as elaborate – as shown above in the photo – but should have a covering to prevent this food from becoming wet from the rain. Like many of us, deer prefer their sugary breakfast cereal not soggy. More choice food snacks can include wild apples, sunflower seeds, and peanuts (in their shells.) Purchasing in bulk will lower the cost of this smorgasbord.

For Fall and Winter attraction, purchase bales of alfalfa hay. Most hay from farms is of dried grass which deer will reluctantly sample but alfalfa hay is prime good-eats for them. Contact your local farmers (or

ranchers) to find those that specifically bale alfalfa during the summer. Pricing per bale differs but is more expensive than regular grass hay.

One other potential addition to these food plans is adding a mineral salt block. This block (often called a 'salt-lick') is a large cube of salt added with additional minerals vital for herbivore health. Deer will lick this block (like an all-day sucker) to obtain necessary electrolytes.

Please note, wildlife officials refer to all these methods as "deer baiting" in hunting parlance. Many locations forbid these "luring-to-be-shot" methods, but, since you are not hunting, you should be able to adopt these attracting methods. Make sure your "deer diner" is not near areas where hunting will occur. Otherwise, your local hunters will sincerely thank you.

One important point is to obtain all your nearby neighbors' permission before attempting these "deer-deterrence through attraction" actions.

# Conclusion

There are many more plants deer prefer to avoid for one or more reasons. I must reiterate that they will eat any plant if compelled by hunger, so there are no actual deer-proof plants you can grow in a garden. That does not mean to wave the white flag and allow them to raid your valuable garden plantings. There have to be limits on protecting our landscaping from being plundered by wildlife.

If there is at least one fault you may encounter with this ebook, it is on how to construct deer-resistant gardens. What plant will look best with other plants and where to plant them for maximum protection? That process and recommendations are outside my haphazard understanding. Gardens have different sizes and shapes, orientations to sun and shade plus a specific growing zone. There are too many factors in play to describe a perfect deer-repellent garden for you. Your local landscaping businesses (the best ones) will know the best plants and techniques for better success.

The repellent plants I listed in this ebook are from comparing various sources of information from books and online websites. I have tried to list plants gardeners and landscapers seem to agree with as being favorable to keep deer away.

An extensive list of garden and landscape plants deer reportedly love or hate is regularly updated by the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES) Cooperative Extension personnel, and by the Rutgers Master Gardeners of New Jersey, USA. This list is based on rarely, seldom, occasionally and frequently damaged plants caused by deer.

Here is the current website link to this list:

<https://njaes.rutgers.edu/deer-resistant-plants/>.

Once again, this is not an ironclad list in accuracy for different populations of deer, climate, and scarcity of desirable plants will alter these observations. For your specific location, check with your

agricultural extension office for more information on what plants they, and rabbits, usually avoid.

These beautiful creatures are here to stay. Let's try to find common ground where they are off limits but can also feel welcome, especially when food is limited in supply. Don't feel bad if they nibble at and trample on your plants. They are timid animals trying to live in a hostile world. Instead of saying "Why did you damage my garden?" you should rephrase it as "I'm honored you visited my garden!"

You may have the best place in town for a quick and satisfying meal for any deer. In the great scheme of things, I think that is a wonderful compliment to your gardening skills and accomplishments!

## **Thank you for reading this ebook.**

I hope you have enjoyed learning something new about plants you can grow to help repel deer in your flower and vegetable gardens. I have a related ebook series called ***The Scent of Your Garden*** with an emphasis on fragrant garden flowers and plants deer may avoid. I think you will enjoy reading and learning from it.

Please visit my author website at <https://gedwinvarner.com> concerning my other gardening ebooks and contact information.

# About the Author

G. Edwin Varner grew up on a farm helping his father in the crop fields and assisting his mother in the flower and vegetable gardens. This early experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

For twenty years he successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery. Unlike most mail-order nurseries publishing colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog extensively described the flowers he grew. He once said, "I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs." Today, he has the same style of writing (thankfully with fewer words) through a variety of enjoyable and informative ebooks. This time, the ebooks include color photos of each flower.

He encourages you to cultivate something unique and beautiful in your gardens. His motto is "read about it, see it, grow it, and enjoy it!"

G. Edwin Varner lives in a rural area of northeastern Ohio, USA.