

Part THREE

DEER RESISTANT LANDSCAPING¹

Defensive gardening, plants the deer don't eat.

What Plants do Deer Prefer²? **Do you have a deer problem?**

Here are some plants that indicate you have a deer problem, if you find them regularly browsed in your yard or in nearby woodlands:

Common garden pants: hostas, apple trees, yews, arborvitae (white cedar, photo at right), lilies and asters.

Wild / woodland plants: Most members of the lily family (Canada lily, Solomon seal, Clintonia, bellwort and mayflower), orchid family, trillium (both white and red), jewelweed, most viburnum (particularly hobble-bush and maple-leaved), most dogwood shrubs (particularly alternate leafed dogwood), azalea, choke cherry, blueberries, shadbush, red oak, sugar maple and ash seedlings.



Heavily browsed white cedar in Hanover

Warning: When the deer herd is too large, the following defenses and the plants suggested below are not so effective, as deer will eat most anything, even the least-preferred native beech and white pine trees. At this point, management becomes very difficult, and forest recovery is slow; plants in the forest will be probably reduced in variety, with greatly reduced biodiversity.

What Measures Can We Take in our Yards?



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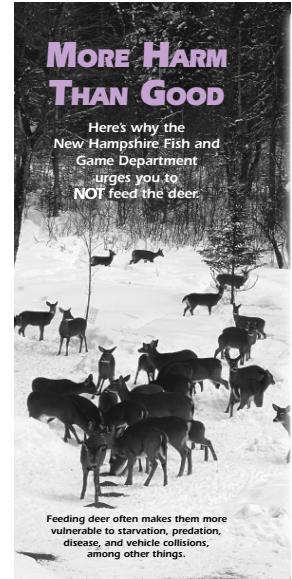
A NO HUNTING policy is a really bad idea: If you own a large parcel of land, posting your land to deter hunting is a sure-fire way to encourage deer over-browse on your land. Deer are smart, so when hunting season starts they look for safe refuge on lands with a No Hunting policy. Ask your neighbors for help in locating responsible hunters.

Deer Deterrents: There are several products that may keep deer from eating your plants. Two products that seem to work are Plantskydd and Liquid Fence concentrates, made from natural products (eggs, garlic) and used in spray form. Used starting early in the growing season and then on a regular basis, they may work for several weeks before the need to re-spray. Spraying the underside of leaves help the deterrent last longer. Granular plant food Milorganite (a product of Milwaukee's solid waste treatment system) sprinkled on the ground may also deter deer from browsing. Wind generated or motion detector bells and whistles may work for a while, but deer are pretty smart about these things.

Don't Feed the Deer: Food for birds and other wildlife can become easy forage for deer. Keep those feeders out of reach of deer. NH Fish and Game has a *More Harm Than Good* pamphlet about this practice, which explains how feeding deer causes them to habituate to human landscapes, taming the animals so they are more like pets than wildlife. These deer will suffer a change in needed nutrition and general health, and are more vulnerable to predation, disease and vehicle collisions. [LINK](#) for the brochure. Feeding deer is illegal in VT.

Fencing: Fencing is an often unattractive and expensive solution to the deer problem. BUT, it works, if it is tall enough. Deer can't jump an 8-foot fence. A lower fence might work in crowded quarters, or even two lower fences placed a few feet apart seem to work.

A Caution: Be sure that the plants you use are well-behaved. Invasive non-natives are of particular concern. To be on safe side, plant native plants. Libraries have many books on gardening with these plants.



Which Plants do Deer Dislike³? Use of certain plants discourage deer.

What makes a plant unattractive to deer? Plants with the following attributes are probably not going to get browsed, *assuming the deer population is not too dense*. It is best to check any plants you consider against the comprehensive Rutgers list (see website below):

- **Strong odor or taste:** Herbs such as oregano, rosemary, sage, tarragon, lavender and thyme do not attract deer. You probably need a fence to protect parsley. Certain annuals such as marigolds are not attractive to deer.
- **Thorns, spines or bristles:** Rugosa rose is not browsed, but other roses (even the invasive multiflora rose) are subject to browse.
- **Toxic compounds:** Examples include monkshood, baneberry, hellebore, black cherry trees.
- **Fuzzy leaves or stems:** examples – dusty miller, yarrow, lamb's ears.
- **Tough leaves:** heavy fibers or leather-like leaves such as yucca, *Ligularia* species or fetterbush shrub.
- **Sharp edges on leaves:** examples – certain sedges or grasses.

Plants that Deer Don't Eat, assuming deer herd is not too large

Flowers:

Annual flowers: dusty miller, licorice plant, marigold, dahlia, alyssum (*Lobularia*), wishbone flower (*Torenia*), flowering tobacco (*Nicotiana*), snapdragon, straw flowers.

Perennial flowers: Allium, Astilbe, monkshood, geranium (cranesbill), false indigo (*Baptisia*), bleeding heart (*Dicentra*), lady's mantle, Lenten rose / Christmas rose (*Helleborus*), hyssop (*Agastache* cultivars), peony, yarrow, Siberian bugloss (*Brunnera* cultivars), iceplant (*Delosperma* – a ground cover), Japanese and old fashioned iris, chrysanthemum, jack-in-the-pulpit, blue cohosh, coreopsis species, ligularia species, lungwort (*Pulmonaria*), trollius, coral bells (*Heuchera* cultivars), primrose, wind-flower (*Anemone*), foxglove, salvia, meadow rue, dianthus, peony, poppy, Shasta daisy, lamb's ear, clematis, delphinium, sweet William, fairy wings (*Epimedium*), speedwell (*Veronica*), Liatris, phlox, cultivars of the native honeysuckle vine (*Lonicera*), bee balm (*Monarda*), columbine and most daffodils.

Shrubs and trees:

Shrubs: Bayberry, mountain fetterbush (*Pieris floribunda*), daphne, ninebark, spirea (some are invasive), Leucoethoe, boxwood, sweet pepperbush (*Clethra* spp), native bottlebrush (*Fothergilla*), Korean lilacs (*Syringa*), weigela, fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*)

Trees: Red pine, paper and river birch, red and striped maple, green ash, kousa dogwood.

Ferns, Herbs, Grasses and Sedges:

Forests where deer abound still have a few plants – deer don't like ferns, most grasses or sedges. A forest floor with large fern or sedge patches might be evidence that deer herd is too large.

Ferns: For gardeners who live with deer, a fern garden might be a good idea. Interesting and handsome native ferns include Christmas fern, Maidenhair fern, Royal fern, Cinnamon fern and Ostrich fern. **WARNING:** avoid hay-scented fern and New York fern, as these tend to spread quickly to form thick mats and are difficult to control, especially in areas with heavy deer browse.

Sedges (Carex family): With a large variety to choose from, these grass-like plants can provide interest in gardens, and a large variety of native sedge plants grow in shade. Some sedges, such as Pennsylvania sedge (see photo), can be made into a shade tolerant lawn that doesn't need mowing.



Sedge Lawn, Garden of the Woods



Little Bluestem Planting / U Mass Amherst

Native bunch grasses, such as little bluestem (photo) or switch grass work well in gardens. These grasses don't spread by root runners, but make clumps with interesting structure, leaves and seeds, and may work well in a deer-proof flowerbed or border. Some grow very tall, many have very deep roots that help stabilize soil and infiltrate stormwater.

¹ Clausen, Ruth Rogers (2011) *50 Beautiful Deer-Resistant Plants*. Timber Press. NOTE: While the book outlines a useful strategy, it

² Rawinski, Tom (2014) [White-tailed Deer in Northeastern Forests: Understanding and Assessing Impacts](#) This is a user-friendly handbook for deer damage assessment, with detail about deer behavior, plant preferences, and vegetation analysis.

³ [Rutgers University has a comprehensive list of garden plants](#) including flowers, bulbs, grasses, groundcovers, ferns, shrubs and trees. The list is organized by deer preference. Some plants may not be cold-hardy for use in Northern New England. A PDF file of the list can be downloaded from this site. Some of the listed plants, such as Russian olive, Norway maple and Japanese barberry, are considered invasive in NH and VT.

If these links don't work, you'll find the URL listed in Part SIX (references)