

Some Plants That MIGHT Not Be Eaten By Deer in Your Area

Previously I have written about the fact that which plants deer will eat depends largely on how many deer are in the area and what else there is to eat. I don't like to use the terms "deer-proof" or "deer-resistant", because these terms imply that the plant is unlikely to be eaten wherever it is found, which might not be true. However, to improve the chances of having plants not eaten by deer, it helps to plant species that are not favorite deer foods, but that might be eaten sometimes.

So, with the caveat that anything I include here may indeed be eaten in your yard, I believe these plants are less likely to be eaten in most areas.

For shrubs, in moderate to low deer population areas, cenizo, evergreen sumac, and Mexican silktassel (all evergreen shrubs), are probably safe to plant, but in higher population areas, they may be browsed. Shrubs less-favored by deer would include agarita, autumn sage (*Salvia greggii*), copper canyon daisy, damianita, flame acanthus, skeleton-leaf goldeneye, Texas lantana (native, not "new gold"), Texas mountain laurel, Texas persimmon and yellow buckeye.

For flowering perennials, the least likely to be eaten would be cedar sage, frostweed, Lindheimer senna, Maximilian sunflower, mealy blue sage, Mexican hat, mountain pink, most milkweeds, orange zexmenia, prairie verbena, silverleaf nightshade, Simpson rosinweed, Texas betony, two-leaved senna, and turk's cap.

Annuals that are usually not eaten include American basketflower, cowpen daisy, mullein, snow-on-the-mountain and white prickly poppy.

Native cacti and succulents are not usually bothered by deer. Native prickly pear are safe from deer as are the native claret cup, strawberry cactus and lace cactus. Most yuccas and agaves are unlikely to be eaten, although the flower stalk that many of them put up in the spring seems to be a favorite treat for deer. Two native succulents, beargrass (*Nolina texana*) and devil's shoestring (*Nolina lindheimeriana*) are not eaten but again their flower stalks may be.

I think it is best to assume that any native hardwood tree will eventually be eaten by deer. These animals obviously prefer some trees to others, but in the 5-10 years between the time when you buy a tree in a small pot and it grows to a height such that the deer can't reach most of the leaves, the deer will almost certainly at last nibble on it occasionally. So if you are planting a tree that is not in a high-fenced yard, it will need to be caged for several years.

If you find a small root-sprout or sapling of any native hardwood before the deer find it, you will likely have very good luck growing it to maturity if you simply cage where it is

before the deer find it. “Volunteer” plants that come up on their own frequently have a higher probability of surviving (if not eaten) because they are already established in that spot.

Grasses, on the other hand, are almost never eaten by white-tailed deer to any significant extent, with the exception of very tender shoots especially in early spring. So, planting some of the larger native grasses such as Big bluestem, Little bluestem, Switchgrass or Yellow Indiangrass (the “Big Four” of the tall grass prairie), plus Lindheimer muhly as ornamentals is completely safe. Also, lower growing grasses that can be attractive include Inland sea oats and lawn grasses like buffalograss, curly mesquite and blue grama.

It is important to note that not all failures to grow new plants can be blamed on deer. Humans with weed-eaters, lawnmowers, herbicides, or fertilizer have been known to do in a lot of new plantings.

It is also important to emphasize that ALL newly-planted plants need to be watered until they are well established, meaning that their roots have grown out into the native soil and have achieved a large enough root mass to support the top growth even in a drought. So, it is important to keep the ground around the plant moist for the first year and don't let a little 0.1” rain fool you into thinking that light shower did anything for the plant.

Please note that all of the above is offered as my best advice, but certainly without any guarantees that some of the things I suggested won't be at least nibbled on.

I am taking a break from the Friday morning 1 on 1 visitations about nature at Riverside Nature Center, but I intend to resume my availability for the 10 to 12 am Friday visits beginning Sept 18.

Until next time...

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