

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 7-21-04) Deer Resistant Plant, ©2005

Every time I'm with a group of gardeners the conversations either start with this question or end with this question, "How do we cope with deer in our garden?" The really foolproof way to deter deer is install a fence (preferably 10-foot tall) around your garden. Visit <http://www.bennersgardens.com/bg/> or <http://www.deerbusters.com/> for ideas.

There's good news and bad news on the deer front. The good news is their tastes change from year to year giving your nibbled, drastically deer-pruned plants time to recover. The bad news is they'll probably nibble anything and everything in your garden sooner or later.

Roses seem to be their favorite food. The younger and more tender the better. Even older thorny roses sometimes appeal as the deer happily munch away, thorns and all. Many of the articles on deer proof plantings suggest thorny, prickly, spiky plants with the exception of roses. The articles say, "Deer love roses." Alas.

You'll find abundant "smelly" or "hot, spicy" products to deter deer. Some gardeners report success with these products, others say it was a waste of money. Odiferous products will dissipate in the rain and need to be reapplied. Consult with your neighbors and ask your favorite nursery person what's worked for them.

My friend Julie, from Omaha, Nebraska lives on the edge of a forest. Once a week she visits local dog groomers and beauty shops collecting human and animal hair to spread along the perimeters of her vegetable garden. When it rains she makes extra trips to the hair suppliers and repeats the deterrent practice.

I have several Master Gardener neighbors within a half-mile radius of my house. Our immediate neighborhood doesn't seem to have a deer problem, but all four of my Master Gardener friends nearby see Bambi and all his relatives dining in their gardens on a daily basis. Maybe the deer are well fed next door and they don't venture up into our neighborhood.

The deer foods of choice reported by disgruntled gardeners in Kitsap are mostly roses, roses and more roses with vegetables and fruit trees thrown in for good measure. When deer need a snack after gorging on roses, they seem to wander through the vegetable gardens sampling as they go. Dave Peters says he's seen deer decapitate his tomato plants (which deer aren't supposed to like) and then the deer spit the samplings out. Others report nibbling of daffodils (even though they're poisonous).

Mary Robson retired King County Extension Agent says, "Deer prefer tender new growth. If plants have been over-fertilized, they are likely to be more chewed." She adds that deer will avoid aromatic plants like rosemary, lavender and santolina. "Stout fencing is the only permanent solution. If the deer can't see through a fence they are less likely to jump over it," Robson says. Barking dogs seem to work well too, she said.

Many deer-proof plant lists suggest using these perennials: Aquilegia (Columbine), Artemesia, Delphinium (Larkspur), Digitalis (Fox Glove), Hellebore, Iris, Kniphofia (red-hot poker), Lupine, Narcissus (Daffodil), Oxalis, Phormium tenax (New Zealand Flax), Trillium, Tulip and Calla Lily. For Shrubs try: Berberis (Common Barberry), Buddleia davidii (Butterfly Bush), Calycanthus (Western Spice Bush), Choisya ternate (Mexican Orange), Cornus stolonifera (Red Osier Dogwood), Cotinus coggygria (Smoke Tree), Daphne, Forsythia, Jasmine, Juniper, Leucothoe, Oleander, Pieris japonica, Rhododendron, Sambucus racemosa (Red Elderberry) and Syringa vulgaris (Common lilac). Suggested vines are: Clematis, Solanum (Nightshade), Tecomaria capensis (Cape Honeysuckle) and Wisteria floribunda (Japanese Wisteria). Deer seem to avoid herbs such as artemesia, rosemary, thyme, lavender and Santolina. Cotoneaster, Hypericum, Nandina, Spireas, Spiera and Lily-of-the-valley are also left intact.

Visit <http://eecs.orst.edu/agcomwebfile/edmat/html/ec/ec1440/ec1440.html> for Oregon State Extension's list of deer resistant plants. While we each experiment with our own ways to deter deer, let's use deer pruning as an excuse to add new plants to our gardens.

Want to tour a wonderful garden for free? Right in the heart of Central Kitsap you'll find a wonderful WSU Master Gardener Learning Garden. Visit Anna Smith Children's Garden on Tracyton Boulevard near Fairgrounds Road. The garden there is exquisite and full of informative signs and is full of growing plants April through October every year. If you visit on Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to noon you can talk to WSU Master Gardeners in person to identify plants, answer questions and conduct you on a tour of the garden. You'll see vegetables, ornamental plants, roses, herbs, small fruits and tree fruits plus a native plant habitat area and a rock garden. The garden area has a compost demonstration site and the Happy Seeds 4H Club plans, plants and tends several planting beds. Please visit Anna Smith and the WSU Master Gardeners. You'll go home with wonderful information to make your gardening experience even better.