

## Deer Proof Plants

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Gardeners that live with deer in their neighborhood are always looking for plants that the interesting but pesky mammals will not eat. Visit the website [plantanswers.com](http://plantanswers.com) for a relatively long list of such plants.

Recently a gardener new to the area said she was tired of deer-proof lists that turned out not to be deer-proof. She wants a definitive list of the plants that deer absolutely will not eat to use for her landscape. I told her that I was not sure that such a list existed because each group of deer seems to eat a different set of plants. That is why we always hedge by saying that this or that plant is not eaten by the "deer in my neighborhood". Or we say that the plant is sometimes eaten as an emergency food source during a drought.

It is also not uncommon for plants that are normally not eaten by the deer to be vulnerable when they are first planted. There are several reasons offered for this vulnerability. Plants newly obtained from the nursery have often been produced at a high rate of growth with high levels of water, fertilizer and light conditions. Apparently these fast growing specimens produce maximum greenery and blooms with a minimum of internal chemicals. The net result that the plants taste more acceptable to the deer when first planted than they will after they have settled into a more normal growth situation.

A second cause of newly placed plants being tasted and or pulled out is because deer are curious. It may be just as likely that the deer doing the damage are just ornery too! One tactic that dampens the inclination of deer to taste or pull out new plants is to treat them with a product such as Liquid Fence, Applied once per week for 3 to 6 weeks the product often discourages the most ornery or curious deer from tasting the new planting of normally deer-proof plants.

Here are some plants to consider for use in a neighborhood with deer.

Texas mountain laurel is a lead plant on most deer-proof lists. It is a drought tolerant evergreen shrub that grows to 15 feet tall. Grow it in full sun in a well-drained soil. The purple blooms that appear every spring have a unique fragrance that smells like grape Kool-Aide. Texas mountain laurel is used as a specimen plant. The deer do not usually eat Texas mountain laurel, but the bucks do sometimes injure the plant by rubbing their antlers on the stems.

Ceniza is another drought tolerant native plant that is usually passed up by deer. The foliage is silver, and the blooms range from rose-hued to blue-hued depending on the variety. It is evergreen and blooms just before or just after it rains. Ceniza is unique for a native plant in that it responds well to hedging as well as being used as a specimen plant in full sun.

There are a number of viburnum varieties that the deer do not usually eat. My favorite is Sandankwa viburnum. It grows to 7 feet tall to make a dense evergreen shrub that works well a hedge in partial sun or shade. Sandankwa has small white blooms and berries that are eaten by the birds in the spring. Spring Bouquet, another selection of viburnum is valued for its pink showy buds and blooms more than

as a hedge. Viburnums still rate as worthy of use in a drought tolerant landscape, but they are not in the league of Texas mountain laurel or ceniza.

Other shrubs that appear on my neighborhood's deer-proof list are pomegranate, pittosporum, and dwarf and standard yaupon holly.

The most reliable deer-proof summer annual is vinca. It is available with red, white, pink, or lavender blooms. Grow it in full sun. Now that the 'Cora' selection is available, vinca has overcome the susceptibility to aerial phytophthora so you should be able to plant it in May and expect it to bloom constantly until the winter cold arrives. The deer do not eat vinca, but the butterflies use its nectar. Gardeners in San Antonio have also had good luck growing angelonia, also called summer snapdragon.

Tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) is a new plant that is appearing on the deer-proof lists. Its primary use is as a nectar source for butterflies and an egg-laying site for Monarch butterflies, but it is a showy perennial with orange or yellow flowers that grows to at least 3 feet tall. Other blooming perennials include the many selections of lantana, salvia, four-o'clock, esperanza, thyrallis, poinciana, and iris.