

Deer Proof Plants

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Based on the weather we are experiencing it's hard to accept that we are moving into the time of the year when temperatures cool. It should start with the night time lows and over the next month the daytime highs should moderate. What that means for gardeners is that we are moving into the winter gardening period. The fall tomatoes should start setting fruit, we will plant broccoli, snapdragons and other cool weather plants. It also means it is the best time of the year to plant trees, shrubs, and perennials. They have an opportunity to develop a root system before they must face next summer's heat.

For many San Antonio area gardeners it is necessary to select plants that the deer won't eat. Here are some to consider.

One of the best deer-proof shrubs is Sandankwa Viburnum. The evergreen plant grows to 7 feet tall and makes an excellent hedge plant or specimen with a disciplined egg-shaped growth habit and dense shiny foliage. It has an attractive but short-lasting bloom in the spring. In addition to not being eaten by the deer, Sandankwa viburnum is shade tolerant and drought tolerant once it is established. Sandankwa has a moderate growth rate.

Another shrub that is not eaten by the deer and is a shade tolerant evergreen is primrose jasmine. Grown as a specimen plant it will grow to 10 feet tall and has a pronounced weeping shape. In early spring primrose jasmine has nickel size, waxy yellow blooms. Primrose jasmine is often used as a hedge plant between the road and residential lots in neighborhoods with lots of deer. It is very thick and practically impenetrable. Primrose jasmine grows very rapidly.

For full sun Texas mountain laurel is one of the best choices for a tall, wide deer proof plant. The native plant will grow to 15 feet tall and 10 feet around. It is evergreen but not as dense as sandankwa or primrose jasmine so is used less often as a hedge plant. Texas mountain laurel has very showy purple blooms however that will perfume the neighborhood every February/March with its famous grape kool-aid fragrance. Texas mountain laurel is a slow grower.

A second full sun shrub to consider is thyrallis. It is an upright shrub that grows to 6-7 feet tall each summer. Its main use is to provide summer long blooms in the tradition of esperanza (which is also usually deer-proof), poinciana and firebush (which are not deer-proof). The small yellow blooms are arranged up and down the upright stems. Thyrallis freezes back to the roots most winters. It is a fast grower once established.

It is time to plant one of the best perennials for neighborhoods with deer, bearded iris. Depending on the variety selected iris can produce white, purple, yellow, blue, violet, brown, pink, or bicolor blooms. Again depending on the variety they could bloom sometime between February and May. They can be as short as 14 inches and as tall as 40 inches. The colorful orchid like blooms are spectacular but the foliage is attractive as well. The foliage is evergreen and sword-like providing an attractive different ground cover. Order iris as rhizomes from internet specialty retailers or from your favorite retail nursery.

Iris are not fussy about soil except that it cannot be soggy. They are very drought tolerant. Plant them in full sun with the rhizome top, level with the soil surface. Do not use mulch.

Yaupon holly is another shrub to use in a neighborhood blessed with deer. Dwarf yaupon holly is a globe shaped shrub that slowly grows to 5 feet tall. It can be planted in sun or light shade and is considered one of the best foundation shrubs. The evergreen leaves are mouse ear shaped and sized. The standard yaupon holly makes a tree 25 feet tall if you allow it. The plant is one of the most flexible in terms of shape and size of all shrubs. Standard yaupon can be pruned to any shape desired. The standard yaupon holly also produces small red berries that are a favorite winter bird food.

All the "deer-proof" (usually!) plants described in this article can be planted now.