As our city expands into wildlife habitat, hungry deer are coping with the reduction of their natural feeding areas and the unbalanced predator to prey ratio by browsing in our gardens. Love them or hate them, they’re here to stay. What’s a homeowner to do?

**Deer-proof plants**

No plant is completely deer-proof. A hungry deer will eat anything, especially in late winter or early spring when natural food supplies are lean and in early-to mid-fall when they are fattening up for winter. The high water content of garden plants makes them particularly appealing to deer during periods of drought.

**Browsing**

Deer are browsers; they eat as they travel, and tend to have specific routes. If your garden is on their route, your plants are at risk. Blocking the deer’s preferred route through your garden is one solution to this problem. Fences, gates, or fishing line stretched across the path may encourage them to take another route.

**Plant choices**

Try to select plants that deer find less appetizing. Plants with fuzzy or leathery leaves like lamb’s ear, or a strong herbal aroma like lavender are usually less attractive to deer. Plants with thorns are similarly avoided, although deer relish the thornless buds and leaves of roses.

Selecting plants that are less appetizing to deer can be difficult because of the unpredictable nature of deer appetites. They’ve been known to shun certain plants one season and gobble them up the next.

Deer will also dine on some plants like coneflowers and penstemon during the early spring when these plants are tender, but they won’t touch them later in the season. Sprays, sachets, and cayenne and egg mixtures may be applied during this time to give new tender plants time to toughen up until they are mature enough to move off the deer’s preferred list.

Also, try planting a single trial plant of a plant you’ve never grown in your garden before investing in mass groupings. If the plant survives for three weeks without being nibbled, then buy the rest.

**Bottom Line**

The bottom line for deer-plagued gardeners is that there are strategies to make gardens less attractive to deer, but none of them work 100 percent of the time. Keep trying until you find something that deters the deer in your area. And, have a sense of humor. Just when you think that you have a defense strategy figured out, deer will change their habits. Try considering those trampled tomatoes and nibbled nasturtiums as a small price to pay for fresh mountain air and wonderful views!

**Strategies**

**Fences and Physical Barriers**

A tall fence (recommend height of 8 feet) is probably the most effective way to keep deer out of your prized plants.

A less expensive deterrent is to put wire cylinders or corrugated drainage tubing around the trunks of valuable young trees and shrubs during the late winter and spring when landscape plants look most appetizing. This will also protect the tender bark from being damaged by rubbing antlers.
**Repellents**

Another approach to deer-less gardening is to use deer repellents. Colorado State University researched several products, including some homemade concoctions, whose effectiveness is shown below.

At our Xeriscape Demonstration Garden, we have had some success with dusting *feather meal* or *Milorganite* on plants we want to protect. It smells bad to humans for a couple of hours following application, but after that the smell is largely unnoticeable and only offensive to deer and possibly rabbits. These products need to be reapplied after a couple of weeks, but unlike most sprays, they don’t need to be reapplied after rain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repellent</th>
<th>Concentration</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hot-Sauce® Animal Repellent (6.2%)</td>
<td>Labeled rate</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken eggs and water</td>
<td>1:4</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coyote urine</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deer Away® Big Game Repellent</td>
<td>Labeled rate</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinder®</td>
<td>Labeled rate</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habanero peppers and water</td>
<td>1:12</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabasco sauce and water</td>
<td>1:1</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soap (Lifebuoy)</td>
<td>1 bar</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Plant list**

The list below contains names of plants that appear most frequently on deer-resistant plant lists, that have been reasonably deer-resistant in the Xeriscape Demonstration Garden, and are readily available at nurseries in Colorado Springs.

**TREES**
- Hawthorn
- Pinon pine

**SHRUBS**
- Apache plume
- Barberry
- Blue mist spirea
- Chokecherry
- Common juniper
- Cotoneaster
- Coralberry or snowberry
- Curl-leaf mountain mahogany
- Fragrant sumac
- Leadplant
- Three-leaf sumac
- Potentilla or cinquefoil
- Rabbit brush
- Russian sage
- Scotch broom
- Siberian peashrub
- Silver fountain butterfly bush

**FLOWERS**
- Artemisia
- Bee balm
- Black-eyed susan
- Blanket flower
- Blue flax
- Daffodil
- Catmint
- Coral canyon twinspur
- Coreopsis
- Desert four o’clock
- Foxglove
- Gay feather
- Germander
- Hyssop
- Iris
- Lamb’s ear
- Larkspur
- Lavender
- Pineleaf penstemon
- Purple coneflower
- Salvia
- Sea holly
- Shasta daisy
- Snow-in-summer
- Yarrow

**ORNAMENTAL GRASSES**
- Big bluestem
- Blue oat or avena grass
- Maiden grass
- Feather reed grass
- Giant sacaton
- Japanese blood grass
- Little bluestem
- Mexican feather grass
- Switchgrass

**GROUNDCOVERS**
- Carpet bugle
- Creeping Oregon grape holly
- Creeping veronica
- Sweet woodruff
- Thyme

Learn more: Call 668-8232 or visit us online at csu.org.