



Deer-Tolerant Ornamental Plants

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Deer like nutrition-rich plants, especially in spring and summer when does are pregnant or nursing, when young deer are growing and when bucks are growing antlers. Fertilized plants, such as those in home landscapes, provide protein, energy-rich carbohydrates, minerals and salts. Deer also get about one-third of their water from the moisture in irrigated plants and young, succulent vegetation on expanding leaves, buds and green stems.

Nuisance deer that feast on home gardens and bucks that damage young trees by rubbing them with their antlers during the rutting season are difficult and expensive to control in residential communities. Although there are a number of commercially available deer repellents on the market, none of them are 100 percent effective. Most “home remedy” repellents, such as soap, human hair and animal dung, are unreliable. Shooting deer or using noise guns is prohibited in most residential neighborhoods, and many citizens are opposed to this method of control. Fencing whole communities or individual properties is often not practical, and may be against local ordinances or community covenants. Trapping and relocating deer is costly and often harmful or fatal to deer.

If deer are overabundant in your neighborhood, and deer herd reduction or management is not feasible, a good way to prevent deer browsing in landscapes is to plant ornamental plants that deer do not like to eat.

There is no such thing as a deer-resistant plant, and when deer populations are high and food becomes scarce, deer may feed on plants that are thought to be deer-tolerant. However, deer generally do not like plants with pungent aromas. Some gardeners have reported success with planting strong-scented plants like lantana, catmint, chives, mint, sage or thyme adjacent to plants that deer frequently browse. Deer also shy away from plants with prickly or rough leaves and plants with a bitter taste. Sometimes, deer browse new plantings or established plants with tender new growth, then avoid those same plants when their leaves are mature.

Over the years, wildlife organizations, universities, botanical gardens and garden writers have constructed many lists of deer-tolerant and deer-susceptible ornamental plants. Because most of these lists are constructed from observational trial-and-error data instead of controlled scientific studies, they are open for criticism. Furthermore, many variables influence deer feeding preferences.

The list below is a compilation of ornamental plants for Georgia hardiness zones that appear in published literature (see References) as well as observations by the authors. It is intended to be a guide for selecting ornamental plants for landscapes where deer browsing is a problem. Plants known to be invasive and a serious problem in natural areas, regardless of their level of deer tolerance, were excluded from the list.

Deer Eat These. Plants Deer Occasionally or Frequently Browse (Protection is recommended)	
Common Name	Botanical Name
American Arborvitae	<i>Thuja occidentalis</i>
American Beautyberry	<i>Callicarpa acericana</i>
American Elder	<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>
American Sycamore	<i>Platanus occidentalis</i>
Arrow-wood	<i>Viburnum dentatum</i>
Asiatic Lilies	<i>Lilium</i> spp.
Beech (low branches)	<i>Fagus</i> spp.
Bittersweet	<i>Celastrus scandens</i>
Black-Eyed Susan	<i>Rudbeckia</i> spp.
Blackgum	<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>
Blanket Flower	<i>Gaillardia</i> spp.
Buttonbush	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>
Carolina Ash	<i>Fraxinus caroliniana</i>
Carolina Buckthorn	<i>Frangula caroliniana</i>
Carolina Yellow Jessamine	<i>Gelsemium sempervirens</i>
Chrysanthemum (fall mums)	<i>Chrysanthemum</i> spp.
Coleus	<i>Coleus</i> spp.
Cosmos	<i>Cosmos</i> spp.
Crossvine	<i>Bignonia capreolata</i>
Daylily (prefer flowers and flower buds)	<i>Hemerocallis</i> spp.
Eastern Redbud	<i>Cercis canadensis</i>
Flowering Crabapple (small trees and low branches)	<i>Malus</i> spp.
Flowering Dogwood	<i>Cornus florida</i>
Fothergilla (flowers and new growth)	<i>Fothergilla</i> spp.
Fringetree	<i>Chionanthus virginicus</i>
Gerbera Daisy	<i>Gerbera jamesonii</i>
Grape Hyacinth	<i>Muscari</i> spp.
Green Ash (tender new growth)	<i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i>
Greenbriar	<i>Smilax</i> spp.
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus</i> spp.
Hibiscus	<i>Hibiscus</i> spp.
Some Hollies (some, such as Lusterleaf, Mary Nell, Nellie R. Stevens, Blue)	<i>Ilex</i> spp.
Hollyhock	<i>Alcea</i> spp.
Honey Locust	<i>Gleditsia triacanthos</i>
Hop Hornbeam	<i>Ostrya virginiana</i>
Hosta	<i>Hosta</i> spp.
Hydrangea (bigleaf, oakleaf, climbing)	<i>Hydrangea</i> spp.
Impatiens	<i>Impatiens walleriana</i>
Indian Hawthorn	<i>Rhaphiolepis indica</i>
Japanese Maple (tender new growth)	<i>Acer palmatum</i>
Morning Glory	<i>Ipomea</i> spp.
Trumpet Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i>
Pansy	<i>Viola</i> spp.
Petunia	<i>Petunia</i> spp.
Redbay	<i>Persea borbonia</i>
Red Maple	<i>Acer rubrum</i>
Rhododendron	<i>Rhododendron</i> spp.
Rose Balsam	<i>Impatiens balsamina</i>
Roses	<i>Rosa</i> spp.

Plants Deer Occasionally or Frequently Browse (Protection is recommended)	
Common Name	Botanical Name
Sedum 'Autumn Joy'	<i>Sedum 'Autumn Joy'</i>
Serviceberry	<i>Amelanchier arborea</i>
Soloman's Seal,	<i>Polygonatum</i> spp.
Sourwood (tender new growth)	<i>Oxydendron aroreum</i>
Strawberry Bush	<i>Euonymus ameicanus</i>
Summersweet Clethra	<i>Cletra alnifolia</i>
Swamp Cyrilla	<i>Cyrilla racemiflora</i>
Sweetbay Magnolia	<i>Magnolia virginiana</i>
Sweetshrub	<i>Calycanthus floridus</i>
Titi	<i>Cliftonia monophylla</i>
Trumpet Creeper	<i>Campsis radicans</i>
Tulips	<i>Tulip</i> spp.
Violas	<i>Viola</i> spp.
Virginia Sweetspire	<i>Itea virginica</i>
Yew (English and Japanese)	<i>Taxus</i> spp.

Trees Deer Rarely Browse	
Common Name	Botanical Name
Bald Cypress	<i>Taxodium distichum</i>
Carolina Silverbell	<i>Halesia carolina</i>
Cherry Laurel	<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>
Crape Myrtle	<i>Lagerstroemia indica</i>
Dawn Redwood	<i>Metasequoia glyptostroboides</i>
Deodar Cedar	<i>Cedrus deodara</i>
Eastern Redcedar	<i>Juniperus virginiana</i> L.
Falsecypress	<i>Chamaecyparis</i> spp.
Fir	<i>Abies</i> spp.
Ginkgo	<i>Ginko biloba</i>
Goldenraintree	<i>Koelreuteria paniculata</i>
Gordonia	<i>Gordonia lasianthus</i>
Japanese Cedar	<i>Cryptomeria japonica</i>
Katsura Tree	<i>Cercidiphyllum japonicum</i>
Kousa Dogwood	<i>Cornus kousa</i>
Pawpaw	<i>Asimina triloba</i>
Palm	<i>Many genera and species</i>
Pine	<i>Pinus</i> spp.
Saucer Magnolia, Japanese Magnolia	<i>Magnolia x soulangiana</i>
Southern Magnolia	<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i>
Smoketree	<i>Cotinus obovatus</i>
Spruce	<i>Picea</i> spp.
Sugar Maple	<i>Acer saccharum</i>
Sweetgum	<i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>
Tuliptree, Tulip Poplar	<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>

Shrubs Deer Rarely Browse	
Common Name	Botanical Name
Banana Shrub	<i>Michelia figo</i>
Barberry	<i>Berberis</i> spp.
Beautybush	<i>Kolkwitzia amabilis</i>
Bottlebrush Buckeye	<i>Aesculus parviflora</i>
Boxwood	<i>Buxus</i> spp.
Butterfly Bush	<i>Buddleia</i> spp.
Common Witchhazel	<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i>
Cotoneaster	<i>Cotoneaster</i> spp.
Deutzia	<i>Deutzia</i> spp.
Drooping Leucothoe	<i>Leucothoe fontanesiana</i>
European Fan Palm	<i>Chamaerops humilis</i>
Firethorn (<i>Pyracantha</i>)	<i>Pyracantha coccinea</i>
Flowering Quince	<i>Chaenomeles speciosa</i>
Gardenia	<i>Gardenia</i> spp.
Glossy Abelia	<i>Abelia</i> spp.
Some Hollies (yaupon, inkberry, Chinese and Japanese) See occasionally browsed list.	<i>Ilex</i> spp.
Japanese Andromeda	<i>Pieris japonica</i>
Japanese Plum Yew	<i>Cephalotaxus harringtonia</i>
Japanese Rose	<i>Kerria japonica</i>
Junipers	<i>Juniperus</i> spp.
Needle Palm	<i>Rhapidophyllum hystrix</i>
Oleander	<i>Nerium oleander</i>
Osmanthus	<i>Osmanthus</i> spp.
Pineapple Guava	<i>Feijoa sellowiana</i>
Pomegranate	<i>Punica granatum</i>
Primrose Jasmine	<i>Jasminum mesnyi</i>
Sotol	<i>Dasyllirion wheeleri</i>
Spirea	<i>Spiraea</i> spp.
Sweet Box	<i>Sarcococca hookeriana</i>
Viburnum	<i>Viburnum</i> spp.
Wax Myrtle	<i>Myrica cerifera</i>
Weigela	<i>Weigela florida</i>
Winter Daphne	<i>Daphne odora</i>
Yucca	<i>Yucca filimentosa</i>

Ornamental Grasses Deer Rarely Browse	
Common Name	Botanical Name
Fountaingrass	<i>Pennisetum alopecuroides</i>
Feather Reed Grass	<i>Calamagrostis</i> spp.
Hakone Grass	<i>Hakonechloa macra</i>
Lemongrass	<i>Cymbopogon citratus</i>
Little Bluestem	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>
Northern Sea Oats	<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>
Pampas Grass	<i>Cortaderia selloana</i>
Pink Muhly Grass	<i>Muhlenbergia capillaris</i>
Purple Moor Grass	<i>Molinia caerulea</i>
Ravenna Grass	<i>Erianthus ravennae</i>
Sedge	<i>Carex</i> spp.
Sweet Flag	<i>Acorus</i> spp.
Switch Grass	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>

Vines and Groundcovers Deer Rarely Browse	
Common Name	Botanical Name
Bugleweed (<i>Ajuga</i>)	<i>Ajuga reptans</i>
Columbine	<i>Aquilegia</i> spp.
Confederate Jasmine	<i>Trachelospermum jasminoides</i>
Creeping Raspberry	<i>Rubus calycinoides</i>
Creeping Lantana	<i>Lantana montevidensis</i>
Dwarf Mondo grass	<i>Ophiopogon japonicus</i>
Japanese Pachysandra	<i>Pachysandra terminalis</i>
Junipers	<i>Juniperus</i> spp.
Liriope	<i>Liriope spicata</i>
Plumbago	<i>Ceratostigma plumbaginoides</i>
Prostrate Rosemary	<i>Rosemarinus officinalis</i> 'Prostratus'
Sweet Woodruff	<i>Galium odoratum</i> (<i>Asperula odorata</i>)
Thyme	<i>Thymus</i> spp.

Annuals Deer Rarely Browse	
Common Name	Botanical Name
Ageratum	<i>Ageratum houstonianum</i>
Alyssum	<i>Lobularia</i> spp.
Annual Periwinkle	<i>Catharanthus</i> spp.
Annual Salvia	<i>Salvia</i> spp.
Baby's Breath	<i>Gypsophila</i> spp.
Bachelor's Buttons	<i>Centaurea cyanus</i>
Basil	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>
Calendula, Pot Marigold	<i>Calendula officinalis</i>
California Poppy	<i>Eschscholzia californica</i>
Cock's Comb	<i>Celosia</i> spp.
Dusty Miller	<i>Centaurea cineraria</i>
Flowering Tobacco	<i>Nicotiana</i> spp.
Lantana	<i>Lantana</i> spp.
Marigold	<i>Tagetes</i> spp.
Parsley	<i>Petroselinum crispum</i>
Scarlet Sage	<i>Salvia coccinea</i>
Swedish Ivy	<i>Plectranthus</i> spp.
Snapdragon	<i>Antirrhinum majus</i>
Spiderflower	<i>Cleome</i> spp.
Strawflower	<i>Bracteantha bracteata</i>
Stock	<i>Matthiola incana</i>
Sweet Pea	<i>Lathyrus odoratus</i>
Verbena	<i>Verbena x hybrida</i>

Herbaceous Perennials and Bulbs Deer Rarely Browse	
Common Name	Botanical Name
Allium	<i>Allium</i> spp.
African Lily	<i>Agapanthus</i> spp.
Amaryllis	<i>Hippeastrum</i> spp.
Anise Hyssop	<i>Agastache</i> spp.
Aster	<i>Aster</i> spp.
Astilbe	<i>Astilbe</i> spp.
Balloon Flower	<i>Platycodon grandiflorus</i>
Beebalm	<i>Monarda didyma</i>
Boltonia	<i>Boltonia</i> spp.
Bush Cinquefoil	<i>Potentilla fruticosa</i>
Butterfly Weed	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>
Candytuft	<i>Iberis</i> spp.
Cardinal Flower	<i>Lobelia</i> spp.
Catmint	<i>Nepeta</i> spp.
Christmas Fern	<i>Polystichum arcostichoides</i>
Cinnamon Fern	<i>Osmunda cinnamomea</i>
Columbine	<i>Aquilegia</i> spp.
Crinum Lily	<i>Crinum</i> spp.
Crocosmia	<i>Crocosmia</i> spp.
Crocus	<i>Crocus</i> spp.
Daffodils	<i>Narcissus</i> spp.
Dahlia	<i>Dahlia</i> spp.
Delphinium	<i>Delphinium</i> spp.
Elephant Ears	<i>Alocasia</i> spp./ <i>Colocasia</i> spp.
False Indigo	<i>Baptisia australis</i>
Foamflower	<i>Tiarella cordifolia</i>
Forget-Me-Not	<i>Myosotis</i> spp.
Four O'Clock	<i>Mirabilis jalapa</i>
Foxglove	<i>Digitalis</i> spp.
Gay-feather (Liatris)	<i>Liatris</i> spp.
Globe Thistle	<i>Echinops</i> spp.
Goldenrod	<i>Solidago</i> spp.
Green Jerusalem Sage	<i>Phlomis</i> spp.
Hens and Chickens	<i>Sempervivum</i> spp.
Iris	<i>Iris</i> spp.
Jack-in-the-pulpit	<i>Arisaema triphylum</i>
Lamb's Ear	<i>Stachys byzantine</i>
Lantana	<i>Lantana</i> spp.
Larkspur	<i>Consolida ambigua</i>
Lavender	<i>Lavandula</i> spp.
Lavender-cotton	<i>Santolina chamaecyparissus</i>
Lenten Rose	<i>Helleborus</i> spp.
Lily-of-the-Nile	<i>Agapanthus africanus</i>
Lupine	<i>Lupinus</i> spp.
Marjoram	<i>Origanum marjorana</i>
May Apple	<i>Podophyllum peltatum</i>
Meadow Rue	<i>Thalictrum aquilegifolium</i>
Mint	<i>Mentha</i> spp.
Money Plant	<i>Lunaria annua</i>

Herbaceous Perennials and Bulbs Deer Rarely Browse	
Common Name	Botanical Name
Oregano	<i>Oreganum vulgare</i>
Peony	<i>Paeonia</i> spp.
Perennial Sunflower	<i>Helianthus</i> spp.
Pinks	<i>Dianthus</i> spp.
Poppy	<i>Papaver</i> spp.
Primrose	<i>Primula</i> spp.
Purple Coneflower	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>
Rose Campion	<i>Lychnis coronaria</i>
Rosemary	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>
Royal Fern	<i>Osmunda regalis</i>
Russian Sage	<i>Perovskia atriplicifolia</i>
Snowdrop	<i>Galanthus nivalis</i>
Society Garlic	<i>Tulbaghia violacea</i>
Speedwell	<i>Veronica</i> spp.
Sweet Woodruff	<i>Galium odoratum (Asperula odorata)</i>
Statice	<i>Limonium latifolium</i>
Tansy	<i>Tanacetum vulgare</i>
Tarragon	<i>Artemisia dracunculus</i>
Threadleaf Coreopsis	<i>Coreopsis verticillata</i>
Toad Lily	<i>Tricyrtis hirta</i>
Texas Sage	<i>Salvia greggii</i>
Wallflower	<i>Cheiranthus</i> spp.
Wild Indigo	<i>Baptisia</i> spp.
Wormwood	<i>Artemesia</i> spp.
Yarrow	<i>Achillea filipendulina</i>

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