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Preventing Deer Damage in Landscapes with Deer-Resistant Plants

Successfully growing plants in Wyoming is challenging. The growing season can be short, the wind fierce, and there are plenty of four footed munchers. The animals eating your plants can be large or small. Whitetail and mule deer are some of the larger animals that can destroy a landscape or garden quickly. Although it can be discouraging to have so many factors working against a gardener, one of the most encouraging and simple things to do is take a

In Wyoming, deer and people are often neighbors. Using deer resistant plants and other tactics can help reduce the chance of conflicts between neighbors and increase your pleasure in your landscape all season long.

driving tour of your community. It can be inspiring to see how other community members have handled the challenges. In deer-visited communities, look for plants that seem to be thriving unfenced. These tend to be deer-resistant.

Deer-resistant plants

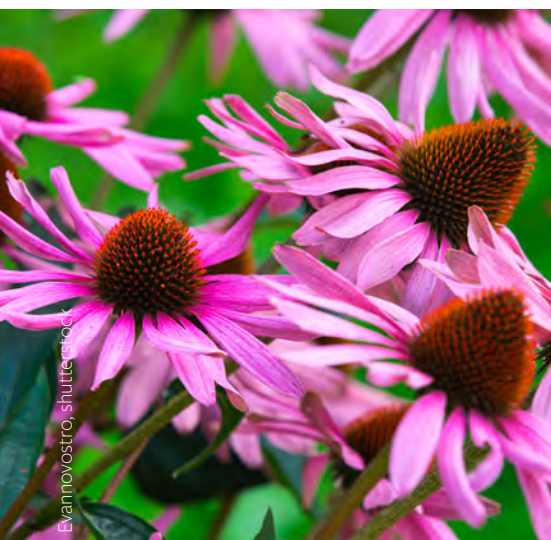
Of course, there is an exception to every rule. For every plant on a deer-resistant plant list, someone has a story about how a deer ate it in their yard. “Deer-resistant” simply means the plant may be browsed occasionally, yet is less likely to be devoured than other plants. Deer are very curious creatures, especially young fawns. Location can count as well. Plants along main deer travel corridors are more likely to be “snacked”

simply out of convenience. Many times deer-resistant plants that come straight from the nursery will be preyed on because they have been “babied” with fertilizer and ample water, making them more tender and, therefore, more palatable. Protecting these plants during their first year of establishment can increase the chance they will survive until they are less palatable, and deer become less interested in them.

A driving tour of communities with large populations of deer reveal some of the plants often left unfenced are salvia (meadow sage), catmint, iris, peony, echinacea (purple coneflower), daffodils, rudbeckia (black-eyed susan), coreopsis, oriental poppy, lamb’s ear, Russian sage, daylily,

yarrow, hyssop, and hollyhocks. This is by no means a complete list; however, these common plants seem relatively unscathed by urban deer. Bulbs that can add early spring color and tend to go un-munched by deer are crocus, daffodils, some botanical tulips (this is not your average tulip), hyacinth and allium.

Look for additional information about deer resistant species under the landscaping tab on the Barnyards and Backyards website (barnyardsandbackyards.com) under “Reducing Wildlife Damage.” This publication from Rutgers, <https://bit.ly/PlantsDeerResistance>, organizes the plants as *Rarely Damaged*, *Seldom Severely Damaged*, *Occasionally Severely Damaged* and *Frequently Severely Damaged*. This guide can be a good starting point for plant selection, but like previously mentioned, there is no silver bullet, and urban deer do not always follow the “rules” of these guides. However, following a guide like this is likely to result in at least some success.



Echinacea (Purple Coneflower)

While on your driving tour, observe the landscaping of organizations like municipal buildings, public libraries and parks. They can have good indicators of deer-resistant plants as well. Some of these spaces may even have plant labels to help residents identify them so they can use them in their own landscapes. The driving tour can also be inspiring for developing fencing ideas. Many gardeners are very creative, resilient people. The Barnyards and Backyards website section mentioned above also has information on fencing. This CSU bulletin touches on plants, fencing and repellents, <https://bit.ly/CSUDeerDamage>.

Living with urban deer

Although we often have no control over the deer eating plants in our yards, it is important to remember not to intentionally feed deer due to public safety concerns and the risks to these animals. Wyoming communities often have ordinances against feeding deer. Providing supplemental foods like grain, bird seed or corn to deer may make you feel like you are helping these animals through a cold winter, but in reality there is greater harm than good.

Deer are ruminant animals, which means they have four stomachs like a cow. Each stomach compartment contains microbes—bacteria that help ferment food for digestion. The microbes gradually change and adapt to what food is readily available throughout the year. In

the winter, for instance, deer are primarily browsing on woody plants. Suddenly changing a deer’s diet to corn can make it very difficult for the food to be digested since there is not a strong microbe to food source match; it is not uncommon for a deer with this sudden diet change to starve to death on a full stomach.

Feeding deer supplemental feed can cause deer to concentrate on feed-sites and can have impacts on the herd in several ways. First, smaller deer and fawns can get pushed away from supplemental feed and end up with less food to eat than if they would have sought it out on their own. Secondly, concentrated deer are more likely to spread the very contagious and fatal nervous system disease, Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). CWD is transmitted through prions which are found in deer’s urine, feces and saliva. The disease can be transmitted through direct contact or indirectly through the environment. Additionally, concentrations of animals have the potential to increase negative interactions with people and animals such as vehicle collisions or fights with household pets.

Navigating co-existence with deer can be challenging, but keep in mind there are people to help. Local Game and Fish officials are a great resource, as well as the local Extension office.

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While on your driving tour, you may also spot **Abby Perry**, Carbon County range extension educator. She can be reached at ajacks12@uwyo.edu or (307) 328-2642.