

# Deer in the Landscape

Aug 1, 2001 - © [Wesley Ford](#)

Would you believe that at the turn of the 20th century, the [white tail deer](#) was an endangered species in many areas. Particularly on the east coast of North America. Special protections and re-introduction programs were common to repopulate deer into many areas of its former range. Today, this conservation effort has to rank as one of this nation's largest success stories. In fact it is estimated that today there are more white tail deer than when the first settlers arrived in the new world. Now thats success! Need more proof? Check out [White Tail Deer Populations in Maryland](#)

Many might even consider that this "huge" success is becoming one "huge" problem. It's the too much of a good thing syndrome. Yes, white tails are extending their range into suburban neighborhoods and making a pest of them selves. The combination of increasing deer population and the creation of ideal deer habitat in suburban communities is resulting in ever increasing deer herd sizes in these areas. What's attracting them? Tender lawns to graze and a tasty buffet of browse in ornamental landscapes. Add landscape cover that affords privacy and a sense of isolation and you have the ingredients for good deer habitat. The white tails are only doing what comes naturally, filling a vacuum. [Suburban Whitetail Management of Northern Virginia](#) provides more compelling info on deer encroachment into human habitats. (Click on the education links in the left hand column of the page.)

So what's a poor homeowner, who's trying establish and maintain a garden to do? How do we discourage deer from feasting on our favorite specimen plants, or even those run of the mill plants that fill the voids? Tough questions, but with a little insight, planning for the inevitable, and the use of some effective products we at least can keep the carnage under control.

Lets begin with the insight. It helps if we understand a little deer ecology. [White Tail Deer Description and Habit](#) is a basic primer on this subject. We are ingrained by movies such as *Bambi* to believe that white tail deer are creatures of the deep woods, existing as far as possible away from human influence. Nothing could be further from the truth. Deer are in fact creatures of the "edge"- the transition zone where two or more habitat types border. Urban and suburban neighborhoods abound in "edge". It is these transition zones and the multiple cover and food types that are in close proximity that attract deer. The menu is large and varied- a flavor for every taste. If one type of food crop fails another type is readily available nearby. The white tail's digestive tract and metabolism is quite adaptable. And they seem to simply savor a variety of tastes. It is reported that deer will browse on over 600 species of plants. So at least something (and probably many somethings) in your yard is likely to be on the deer diet. For more info visit [Deer Food Requirements and Feeding Habits](#).

Then there is the matter of cover. Deer require cover that provides a sense of seclusion or privacy. In today's landscapes this seclusion is deliberately planned to afford the owner a semblance of privacy. Perfect for deer who are by nature somewhat shy. If there is some dense cover nearby to scoot to, then whitetail feel secure and if they feel secure then they will frequent an area.(yard). And as deer become more and more accustomed to living in close quarters with humans with minimal threats being made to their well being then the less truly secure the cover must be.

Lets see- food plus cover less predation equals deer heaven. Right in our own back and front yards we are inviting deer to not only visit occasionally, but to occupy the spare bedroom permanently. And that is bound to equal trouble if we are attached to our plants and landscapes. Deer, if they like a plant well enough or are hungry enough can destroy a specimen in short order.

Well, now we know that simply by creating a landscape out of a former farm field, or by opening up a formerly dense stand of trees we are creating deer habitat. Our challenge is to not only recognize this but to anticipate and therefore try to plan for its eventuality. In doing this we should plan to use plants that that have very little attraction to deer. Yes, we can still use some of those deer attractive plants, but in sparing numbers and juxtaposed with plants that either repel or at least are not palatable to deer. Yep, we hide the rose among the thorns.

It is important to note here that there are no truly fool proof deer proof plants. Plants that are avoided by deer in one locale may be a favorite in another. Or they may be left alone during one season of the year only to be nailed during another season when more preferred plants are unavailable. So it must be noted that plant lists of deer resistant plants may not be fully reliable. Each is based on the experience of the author(s) often on a regional basis. Below are links to several lists of deer resistant plants. I would suggest you review these and any others you can find that might be more local to you to find resistant plants. There are some basic rules of thumb to help guide plant selection: 1. Use plants with hairy or fuzzy leaves. Stachys (lambs ears) and artemesias come to mind here.

2. Use aromatic plants. Sharply scented and flavored flowers like marigolds and herbs such as oreganos, lavenders and sages are an example.

3. Plants with thorny or stickery leaves. Yucca, prickly pear cactus, rugosa roses.

Once again I must emphasize that these are rules of thumb, i.e. in the wild deer love green briar and cat briar as winter browse.

In my next article, I will discuss some of the products available used to dissuade deer from doing what comes naturally.

## **Lists of Deer Resistant Plants on the Net**

[Deer-Resistant Landscape Nursery](#) is a limited list of plants offered by an online nursery in the Northeast U.S. They have a photo album of plants [Here](#)

A Deer resistant plant list by [Forrest Appleton](#), a Texas Master Gardener and retired nursery professional.

[Heres a short list](#) from a Pennsylvania landscape firm.

[Reducing Deer Damage to Ornamental and Garden Plots](#) is a long list of relative palatability of plants to deer from Cornell University.

Do you know of other good lists? E-mail them to me or list them in the accompanying discussion and I will be happy to add them to this list.

Read more at Suite101: [Deer in the Landscape](#)  
[http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/mid\\_atlantic\\_plantsman/76046/2#ixzz0pn53E1mD](http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/mid_atlantic_plantsman/76046/2#ixzz0pn53E1mD)

The copyright of the article **Deer in the Landscape** in [Plants & Trees](#) is owned by Wesley Ford. Permission to republish **Deer in the Landscape** in print or online must be granted by the author in writing.