

HOW TO HANDLE DEER PROBLEMS IN YOUR YARD

LOW LEVEL DEER BROWSE ON PLANTS

You probably have healthy fruit trees and roses with little noticeable damage. During late summer/early fall, you begin to notice many leaves missing. At this level, it's best to move the plants the deer like near to the house or fence them off. Fencing can be very minor. This is the level at which most deer tricks and "folk" remedies work. However, prepare to move up to next level of protection as your garden develops and the deer get wise to your tricks. Remember to cage all plants the first fall if you are watering or doing fall planting. Deer will zero in on most *Ceanothus* and *Cercocarpus* species.

MODERATE LEVEL DEER BROWSE ON PLANTS

Your trees will have no fruit or leaves below 4 feet. Your roses will have every leaf removed in late summer and fall. Plants listed as "Deer Proof" hold up well but will be sampled once or twice a year. If you plant and/or water your plants during late summer/fall expect to get much more damage. This is deer salad in a dry time. Do not plant *Atriplex* species or *Arctostaphylos* from areas other than your own. Most *Ceanothus*, *Fremontodendron*, *Lyonothamnus* and *Lilium* species must be caged until tall and woody. Deer will also eat small pines in fall, so cage. They will also eat new growth on pines if it can be reached. Again, cage the first fall. Planting in an area that receives moderate level deer browse is much easier in the spring.

HIGH LEVEL DEER BROWSE ON PLANTS

At this level, deer are literally living with you. During the day you see them sleeping, while at night they wander through your garden sampling as if at a salad bar buffet. You may even notice they will even eat so-called poisonous plants like oleanders and buckeyes. In the fall, redwoods and other soft-wooded conifers can be pushed out of the ground by bucks cleaning their antlers. Las Pilitas Nursery experienced this nuisance for a month, two years in a row, near the end of the 7-year drought. Deer destroyed thousands of container stock until a 7-foot fence and motion detectors were installed. The fence has to be one the deer can neither climb over nor crawl under. Fences work best on a slope because deer do not seem to want to jump fences where the land slopes steeply. With a slope you can get away with a much lower fence. A 3-foot orchard fence with 2 strands of barb wire above (making it a 4-foot fence) next to a 45% slope will not be jumped. Large bucks can clear a 7-foot fence on flat ground if determined. Deer will get under a fence with as little as a 5-inch clearance. Again, remember to stop watering as soon as possible. Watering does not allow a plant to form protective resins and will make a normally stinky leaved plant like elderberry odorless and edible to deer.

The following plants offer hope in deer infested areas:

- Acacia greggii*. A well armed shrub-tree. Deer will only eat new growth.
- Amorpha californica*. Deciduous shrub. Deer have never touched. Difficult to grow and hard to find.
- Baccharis pilularis* 'Pigeon Point'**. Cover for first year with chicken wire so deer can not pull out of the ground. Plant 1-gallon size 8 feet apart & in 2 to 3 years will have a fine groundcover.
- Ceanothus* '**Blue Jeans**'. Has been deer proof at all but one site to date. If heavily watered or in rich soils deer will eat in late summer/fall.
- Ceanothus* '**Mills Glory**'. Have been deer proof at all known sites.
- Ceanothus* '**Snowball**'. Deer proof on all sites but is only happy at coast.
- Cupressus* species. Deer do not like these at all. Drive 3 T -posts next to these after they get 4-5 feet tall. Bucks love to clean the dead skin off their antlers on these.
- Mimulus (Diplacus)* species. Shrubby Monkey flowers have not been enjoyed by deer yet.
- Erigeron glaucus*. 'Wayne Roderick' seems to be most deer proof in most instances. Other varieties go from untouched to nothing left.
- Ferns**. California native ferns seem to be safe.
- Iris* species. Deer have not eaten even if bedding in vicinity. Unknown if safe on sites where they are not native.
- Monardella* species. Untouched.
- Satureja douglasii*. Will be deer proof if you stop watering in summer and allow it to go dormant.
- Sequoia sempervirens*. Same as Cupressus.
- Sequoiadendron giganteum*. Same as Cupressus.

Adapted from Las Pilitas Nursery with permission from Bert Wilson 2000.

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