



If You Plant It... they *will* come!

By Charlie Basham

UCCE/El Dorado County Master Gardener

A hungry deer will eat most any plant, even the deer-resistant varieties. I found this to be true last year after a small herd of the four-legged weed eaters feasted on my garden of deer-resistant ornamental plants, plus an entire vegetable garden for dessert! For the coming growing season I've completed my homework to find the best option for keeping the hungry creatures at bay.

First, a few enlightening facts about Bambi's dining habits. Typical deer food staple is leaves, stems, and buds of woody plants. They also eat fruits, nuts, ornamental garden blossoms and the plant's leaves, a wide variety of grasses, and most any above-ground home agricultural crop. A typical deer can consume up to 4% of its body weight every day. Deer damage peaks in the late winter months, or anytime their normal food sources become scarce. Drought, wildfires, livestock grazing, urban development and other habitat-altering events will also affect their food sources. No plant, bush or tree is truly deer-proof. Deer will sample most anything at least once, even if they don't like it. Deer typically forage in the early mornings and late evenings. BUT, they'll nosh on a lush garden any time of the day or night.

Using frightening noises, lights or tethered barking dogs to make deer permanently move out of an area typically provide only temporary relief. They'll be back!

Deer have certain food aversions you can take advantage of by planting deer-resistant ornamental plants and shrubs. However, there is no guarantee... deer are fickle and unpredictable creatures. Lists of deer-resistant plants are available at most nurseries and they should be used as a general guide. One of the most useful lists can be found in *The Sunset Western Garden Book*. Landscaping and gardening catalogs may also designate deer-resistant plants.

There are contact repellents and area repellents. Contact repellents make plants taste bad to the deer but they are not considered to be highly effective. They must also be applied frequently, especially after a rain, and as new foliage develops. Contact repellents can be home remedy

concoctions or commercial chemical sprays and powders. Some chemical repellents are not allowed on food crops so read the label closely to make sure the repellent is registered for that purpose.

Area repellents emit a foul odor. These include human hair, soap bars with intense aromas, and mountain lion urine or other predator odors available commercially. Although these substances may repel deer for a day or two, they are typically not satisfactory, long-term solutions.

Probably the most effective method of preventing deer damage is a sturdy seven to eight-foot high fence of high-tensile wire and woven mesh. Keep in mind that deer are just as likely to crawl under or through a fence than jump over it, so place an extra strand of wire along the lower portion of a conventional fence to help keep the hungry little darlings at bay.

You can also stretch multiple strands of heavy wire (about four to six inches apart) above a typical six-foot fence to make it appear higher. You do not need barbed wire for these top strands. For more information on fencing, contact an agricultural fencing contractor or supplier. Standard electric fences used for livestock have not proven to be effective for deer control, and they require significant amounts of monitoring and maintenance.

Protecting individual plants may be more economical than fencing an entire area. For example, poultry wire, heavier woven wire, or strong plastic netting can be attached to stakes to circle a plant or a group of plants, such as tomatoes. Keep these protective barriers in place all year long, however.

Now that I know my options I look forward to the year ahead to see if I can successfully outwit the hungry creatures.

On Saturday, April 13th, 2013 UCCE Master Gardeners will present a class on Organic Gardening, Part II. The three-hour class is free and starts at 9 a.m. at the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive, Placerville.

Come on out for the annual Master Gardener Plant Sale on Saturday, May 4th, 2013 in the Veterans Memorial Building parking lot, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. There will be over 4,000 plants available for purchase – tomatoes, vegetables, spring and summer annuals, perennials and more.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.