



Lowcountry Master Gardener Association

www.LowcountryMasterGardeners.org

The Unwelcome Guests

Living in the Lowcountry means having lots of visitors. Recently my nephew and his family of six spent some time here. When my son and his family showed up the numbers went to ten! We truly loved having them here and it was so special for us all to be together; the week flew by and it all seemed effortless. Other guests are not so welcome however.

This morning as I looked out the window I saw a family of deer eyeing the garden. There was a doe and what I think might have been a young buck along with their triplets and they were intensely studying the buffet before them. I quickly ran out and attempted to scare them; the doe and the fawns scattered but the larger one, the one I think was the male, just stood there daring me to come closer. I lobbed pine cones at him and after a while he tired of the game and sauntered off to join his family. These are the kind of arrogant visitors I detest.

Not a week goes by that the Master Gardeners don't get a question or two about how to keep deer away. Everyone wants to know about deer resistant plants. I want to know that too. All I do I know for certain is that a hungry deer will eat whatever is available. A neighbor called me over to see her deer ravaged Burfordii hollies; the top branches were shredded. Burfordii's are very tough plants, the leaves are like hard plastic and they have very pointy tips. This is exactly the type of plant one would think a deer would not go for but in this case that theory did not hold. While in general, deer do have preferences and plants they prefer to avoid, we just can't carve the list in granite.

It is known they avoid plants with strong scents like Rosemary and outlining a flower bed with the creeping form, *Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Prostratus', would provide a wide, low barrier that might keep the hungry ones at bay. You could even plant a hedge of an upright variety keeping it at the preferred height with pruning. They are said to not like plants with fuzzy or hairy leaves so plants like lantana, with its strong, rather unpleasant scent and, in some varieties, somewhat fuzzy leaves, should be a double whammy against them. It is worth a try. Most bulb plants like daffodils are unappetizing to deer. Often the bulbs themselves are poisonous and animals seem to have an innate sense of what is safe to eat. Recently I saw a hedge of dwarf barberry plants, *Berberis thunbergii*; the traditional burgundy leafed variety was interspersed with a new bright yellow variety called 'Golden Nugget.' This was a striking combination, some might say too striking, but I can assure you those thorny braches should keep the deer away.

On the other hand tender plants with sweet tasting leaves and flowers are invitations to the deer to come and munch. The popular and heavily used sweet potato vine in all its color variations is candy to them. They tend to only eat the leaves, leaving row upon row of tiny stems standing at attention. Daylily and other lily buds are also a delicacy. They carefully snip every flower off my tree rose, leaving the thorny stems without a scratch. Interestingly, these are all edible plants for people and that should give us a big clue. An internet search of edible plants should give us a good idea of what not to plant where a hungry deer could get to them.



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