



# What plants do deer hate?

A deer caught browsing Jack Finney's garden Monday morning.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JACK FINNEY

**Q**uestion: I need some deer-proof plants. The deer are eating my garden!

**A**nswer: I'm sorry to say that there are really no deer-proof plants. The deer keep changing their minds about what they like to eat. They will leave something alone for years and then start chowing down on it. They also apparently do not share notes on what tastes good. In one yard, deer will never eat something, but the deer 10 miles away will devour the same thing.

Sometimes they even ignore the advice of human experts and eat things that are poisonous to them.

When I moved to Roseburg 30 years ago, I turned onto Main Street at dusk and saw ahead of me a fawn. I felt like I was living my dream of country life. How picturesque it was – Bambi on Main Street! A year or two later reality set in.

One morning I came out to check on my dahlias and found that the deer had eaten every bud off my 40 dahlias. At that moment I declared war on the deer. Some people have a more charitable attitude toward these wildlife. After all, the deer were here first.

Not me.

A very tall fence went up in the back of the house, but I still have space in the front that the deer and I must share. I think of it as like the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea. Through painful trial and error, I have identified a few easy-care plants that are pleasing to me and distasteful to the deer 90% of the time. Some of these perennials die back in the winter or are annuals that self-seed. For



**Jack Finney**  
*Ask a Master Gardener*

sunny locations where 3-4 feet tall plants are needed, these have worked: Artichoke, Beautyberry (*Callicarpa*), Barberry Orange Rocket (*Berberis*), California Lilac (*Ceanothus*), Tree Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster frigidus*), Sneezeweed (*Helenium 'Mardi Gras'*), Bearded Irises (which the deer will chew on a bit well after bloom when it doesn't hurt the plant at all), Beardless

and Spuria Irises, Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) (of which Hidcote Blue is my favorite), Lupine, Red Hot Poker (*Kniphofia uvaria*), Flowering Quince (*Chaenomeles*), Oriental Poppy (*Papaver orientale*), Russian Sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*), Smoke Bush (*Cotinus*), Rhododendrons, Joe Pye Weed (especially *Eupatorium dubium* Little Joe), Yucca (especially *Yucca filamentosa* Bright Edge), Bear's Breeches (*Acanthus mollis*), Lily of the Nile (*Agapanthus*), Glossy Abelia (*Abelia x grandiflora*), Giant Hyssop (*Agastache Blackadder*) and Bloodtwig Dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea* Midwinter Fire).

More low-growing plants that love sun are Daffodils (*Narcissus*), Elephant-eared saxifrage (*Bergenia*), Naked Ladies (*Amaryllis beledonna*), Rosemary, many of the *Salvias*, Thyme (of which my favorite for cooking is *Thymus Lemon Thyme*), Echebeckia™ Summerina™, Calendula, Snow In Summer (*Cerastium*), Threadleaf Coreopsis (*Coreopsis verticillata*), Zinnias, Snapdragons and Peonies.

For part shade I recommend Foxglove (*Digitalis*), Japanese Andromeda (*Pieris Japonica*), Golden Japanese Forest Grass (*Hakonechloa macra* All Gold), Golden Variegated Sweetflag (*Acorus gramineus* Ogon), Japanese Painted Fern (*Athyrium niponicum* var. *pictum*), Siberian Bugloss, (*Brunnera macrophylla 'Jack Frost'*), Rochford's Holly Fern (*Cyrtomium falcatum* Rochfordianum), Hardy Cyclamen and Bugleweed (*Ajuga*).

Please know that I have not included the botanical name of the plants to be annoying or to show off. Using the botanical name is the best way to get accurate information when looking up most plants.

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*Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu), by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.*



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