



Perennia Landscaping

DEER RESISTANT GARDENS

Before designing a garden, one must consider the problem of deer feeding on your plants. Whether it is a foundation planting around the house, a border or privacy planting, or a perennial, bulb, or annual garden, it is imperative to ascertain the number of deer frequenting the property. One way to do this is to look for signs that deer have been eating plants; another is to look for deer tracks or droppings, or the deer themselves. They usually come to feed on your plants during the early hours of the morning, and early evening. Sometimes they are bold enough to come in the middle of the day. Deer problems are no longer limited to winter and early spring. Some deer will attempt to feed on your plants all year. Ask neighbors about their experiences with deer.

Take this seriously; I have seen beautiful plantings sit unmolested all year until early March, when early one morning a small herd of deer eats most of the foliage and flower buds. A more serious deer problem occurs when deer stay in the vicinity all year round, eating whatever they please.

There are three ways to deal with deer in Westchester County:

1. Fence them out with deer fencing or netting.
2. Periodically spray all vulnerable plants with a reliable deer repellent.
3. Use plants that are deer resistant.

Although this cuts down on the number of plants available for the job, there are, to the knowledgeable horticulturist, a wide variety of trees, shrubs, perennials, bulbs, and annuals that deer don't eat. This list of plants changes yearly as young deer experiment with plants their parents wouldn't eat. Many plants that used to be deer resistant are not anymore. It's important to update this list.



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Deer resistance falls into three categories:

1. What I call “deer proof”. These are the plants that I have never seen get eaten in 35 years of gardening.
2. What I call “deer resistant”. These are the plants that deer usually don’t eat. Some nibbling is possible. If a client loves a certain plant, and deer usually don’t eat it, then it might be a worthwhile experiment to try it. It depends on circumstances.
3. What I call “deer food”. These are plants that deer love to eat and will even jump over obstacles to get to. Unfortunately, some of the showiest plants such as azaleas, rhododendrons, hemlocks, hollies, hydrangeas, lilies, and tulips are on this list. If you absolutely cannot do without these plants, then deer fencing and/or deer repellent spray are essential if deer are in the area.