8 Key Steps to Designing a Fence-Free, Deer-Resistant Garden

By Karen Chapman CPH

It's easy to feel defeated when trying to create a garden that *you'll* enjoy but that the deer will leave alone. Our sole focus is often simply to fill the allotted space with deer resistant plants – and we'll buy *any* that are recommended in books, magazines or online in a desperate desire for success.

Yet the results are often less than fabulous. At best this approach can provide a short-term color boost, and at worst it can look like a bag of jelly beans exploded in the garden; a crazy mish-mash of colors with no sense of a plan.

Yet deer are just another problem to be solved, another criteria to consider – like how much sun or shade an area gets, where the patio should go, how to screen the neighbors.

In fact, **GOOD DESIGN** is more important than ever when dealing with deer.

8 key design principles for a deer-resistant garden

1. Establish the hardscape (think about shapes, materials, sight lines)– create a sense of order to counteract the chaos caused by deer
2. Non-edible focal points (water features, containers, structures) – distract and re-focus attention
3. Color palette – Be strategic and create a sense of unity and order
4. Varying textures and heights of plants – easier to "hide" minor damage
5. Foliage framework – select plants that have beautiful foliage. If/when deer browse the flower buds at the ends of branches you will still have color and beauty
6. Plant selection – focus on deer resistant plants (levels A and B) and think in combinations rather than simply plugging gaps with single plants
7. Avoid monoculture – because you KNOW the deer will have to taste it….
8. Barriers – observe their paths, re-route the deer and/or protect with sprays, temporary fencing etc. (Important for protection against browsing as well as fall rutting).

Defining deer resistance: https://njaes.rutgers.edu/deer-resistant-plants/ (bookmark this!)

A = rarely damaged   B = seldom severely damaged

C = occasionally severely damaged   D = frequently severely damaged

(*Even level A may be nibbled a little on occasion – be realistic in your expectations*.)

Recommended Deer-Repellant Sprays

Liquid fence (also works well for rabbits) Rain resistant. Smelly but OK after ~30' or so

Deer Out (peppermint based and rain resistant)

Bobbex (smells awful – but works well!)

Plantskydd (also works well for rabbits and voles but can be a dog attractant!)

10 Favorite Deer-Resistant Plants for the Pacific Northwest

- Whirling butterflies gaura (*Gaura lindheimeri* 'Whirling Butterflies') USDA 5-9. Deer resistance A
- Paprika yarrow (*Achillea millefolium* 'Paprika') USDA 3-9. Deer resistance B
- Arkansas Blue Star (*Amsonia hubrichtii*) USDA 5-8. Deer resistance A
- Karley Rose fountain grass (*Pennisetum orientale* 'Karley Rose') USDA 5-8. Deer resistance A
- Siberian cypress (*Microbiota decussata*) USDA 3-7 Deer resistance A
- Jerusalem sage (*Phlomis russeliana*) USDA 5-9. Deer resistance A
- Gilt Edge serviceberry (*Elaeagnus* x *ebbingei* 'Gilt Edge') USDA 7-9. Deer resistance A
- New Zealand holly (*Olearia macrodonta*) USDA 8-11 Der resistance: A
- Silver broom (*Adenocarpus decorticans*) USDA 8-10. Deer resistance A
- Shrubby hare's ear (*Bupleurum fruticosum*) USDA 6-10. Deer-resistance A

There are DOZENS more ideas in my new book!

Want more ideas? Take me home with you!

- Today's talk is based on my popular online course (which includes videos and handouts) **Deer-Resistant Design**. Check out the details: https://le-jardinet.thinkific.com/courses/designing-a-deer-resistant-garden
- Pick up a signed copy of my latest book **Deer-Resistant Design: Fence-free gardens that thrive despite the deer** (*Timber press, 2019*)
- Check out my **website** and **blog** for inspiration, events, newsletters, garden tours, and free stuff! https://lejardinetdesigns.com/
- Sign up for my newsletter and receive my FREE download **15 FUN deer-resistant plants** (*because who wants boring stuff??)* https://lejardinet.activehosted.com/f/9
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