

SEEDS FOR MALAWI REPORT

Compiled by Susan Evans – February, 2010

My Experience with Deer-resistant Plants

by Arlene Ommundsen

Part One of Four: Introduction

We live on Scott Point where the current deer density is roughly 10 times historical levels. There are no longer natural predators and some residents have attracted deer by feeding them. The deer have adapted to eating non-native plants and may cause considerable damage in gardens. Nevertheless, with the judicious use of certain plant material and a willingness to protect small plants until they are big enough to survive “tasting” by the deer, I have found it possible to have an unfenced garden.



Deer eat the new growth of trees, shrubs, grasses, ferns, and forbs, and often trample small delicate plants. In the fall, male deer rub their antlers on small trees to remove the antler velvet; these trees can die if the bark is heavily damaged. Bucks also practice sparring with their antlers against trees and shrubs thus breaking branches.

When it comes to deer browsing, there appears to be a hierarchy of plants, ranked according to preference, such that a deer will take the best that is available at any particular time of the year. (However, fawns are very adventurous and will try almost anything, anytime.) My neighbour Gloria has a beautiful bank of *Vinca* that the deer ignore until December, when they strip off all the leaves. Fortunately the plants survive and bloom profusely in the spring.

Deer diets may vary from one region of the Island to another, as growing conditions and types of native vegetation vary. Walking around your neighbourhood will

give you an idea of what is safe to plant outside the fence where you live. Deer may eat almost any species, including small amounts of toxic plants. Toxicity varies among individual plants depending upon the amount of sunlight they receive. Also, the flowers may be less toxic than the leaves or roots of a plant. Deer in our area of Scott Point regularly eat the daffodil flowers blooming in the early spring when there is little else available, but they tend to ignore late-blooming daffodils.

Deer are creatures of habit, regularly following paths through their range, plants on or near these paths are more heavily browsed. I have planted the boulevard and the deer keep it well weeded for me!

I have found that three categories of plants coexist with the deer: 1) Well-known poisonous plants, 2) Plants of low deer preference, and 3) Browse-tolerant plants. In the next installment, I will discuss examples of poisonous plants deer avoid.

Happy gardening!

(Editor's Note: At plant sales, S4M regularly receives questions about deer-tolerant plantings. We are grateful to Garden Club member and S4M volunteer Arlene Ommundsen for agreeing to share her observations and experience about her unfenced garden. Her series of article will appear in the Grapevine. The S4M nursery carries some of the plants she identifies.)

News from Malawi

Our wonderful volunteers in Malawi have purchased and delivered seeds and fertilizers to the food garden beneficiaries, staple crops have been planted, students are attending school and a number of HIV positive mothers in drug treatment are receiving nutritional support. In short, the project is ticking along.

Our big news is that we will soon have a first-hand report from Mzuzu, from Peggy Frank, who visited the project at the end of December. Some of you may know Peggy from her many years living on Salt Spring, or as the founder of Positively Africa, a Victoria-based organization that raises funds for small AIDS-related projects. She is spending three months in Africa visiting project contacts. We are looking forward to hearing about her visit to Mzuzu, and sharing her report with you.

Seeds for Malawi will be at Seedy Saturday on February 13th with plants and locally-saved seeds.