

# SEEDS FOR MALAWI REPORT

Compiled by Susan Evans – May, 2010

## My Experience with Deer-Resistant Plants

by Arlene Ommundsen

### Part Four of Four

In the previous installment, I discussed plants of low deer preference. One option I would encourage everyone to try is true grasses and sedges. Most of these plants require a reasonable amount of sunlight but some of the sedges are more shade-tolerant. *Carex* species come in a variety of colours, and many are evergreen and grow in clumps, all desirable features. I am especially pleased with *Carex morrowii*, its variegated thick leathery leaves with white or gold edges, forming a nice low mound. My favorite of the evergreen true grasses is *Festuca ovina glauca*, 'Elijah blue', of similar growth habit. *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Overdam' is a commanding grass with tall plumes of flowers. It is a variegated clumping grass that can be enjoyed until early spring before being cut back. *Miscanthus sinensis*, 'Morning Light', is also beautiful.

The final category of plants that are useful when gardening with deer is browse-tolerant plants. Some plants are so tough and fast-growing that, once the plants have reached sufficient size, light browsing by deer helps reduce the amount of pruning required, *Choisya ternata* (Mexican orange) is a lovely shrub that blooms twice a year with fragrant flowers resembling orange blossoms. It is very drought-tolerant and disease-resistant. I have three shrubs by the house, which only get browsed on the exposed side and we have to prune them at least once a year. A poor little *Choisya* shrub in the middle of

the garden has taken many years to increase in size though, as it is nibbled from all sides. However it has now established itself and will require our pruning.

*Geranium macrorrhizum* (cranesbill geranium) is the mainstay of my garden. This evergreen geranium is very drought-tolerant, grows in sun or shade, is disease and pest-resistant. It flowers in the spring and does not require deadheading. It is easy to remove if you wish to replace it with something more exotic. The deer do nibble it but are not interested in the flowers. Flower colours include white, and several shades of pink.

My last nominee of a tough fast-growing, deer-resistant plant is *Phormium tenax* (New Zealand flax). Although the plant is closely related to daylilies, the leaves are more fibrous and evergreen. Deer ignore flax plants most of the time, although in the winter the deer have shredded some of the leaves in an attempt to bite them off. This damage can be pruned away in the spring. My flax have not yet bloomed so I can't say if the deer like the flowers, which, borne on a tall stalk may be sufficiently out of reach.

I hope this will inspire you to try some gardening outside the fence. Good luck and happy gardening!

*Thank you Arlene for your excellent series on gardening with the deer.*  
Ed.

The S4M nursery has many grasses and sedges.  
Check out our plant list online at  
[www.seedsformalawi.org](http://www.seedsformalawi.org)

## Spring Fundraising Successes

As project coordinator, I feel blessed and humbled by the variety of independent initiatives taken by Seeds for Malawi supporters to raise enough money each year for the activities that we are funding in Africa. Here are some recent examples of volunteer efforts:

- ☺ A total of about \$5000 was raised in Mill Bay and on Salt Spring at our respective plant sales on April 24. Look for more on this topic in the June Grapevine.
- ☺ In recent months we have received donations from several Garden Clubs on Vancouver Island in response to a letter of appeal that was sent out last November.
- ☺ Peter Bruce's 'Art Cards for Africa' have been selling well at his wife Randi's workplace in Victoria. May I remind you that the beautiful cards made for S4M by Peter and by Petra Bakker are always available in Ganges, at the SOLID Exchange next to the library.
- ☺ We are always gratified to receive donations from individuals. Often these donors have learned about the project from friends, family members, or their Garden Club. The new website can support efforts to interest people in donating to the project.
- ☺ We are deeply appreciative of our loyal sustaining donors, whose contributions are made automatically each month into our bank account.

"Thank you" seems inadequate to acknowledge the creative ideas and commitment of the people who contribute to our fundraising in a myriad of ways.

**Susan Evans**