

Rye Driftwood Garden Club

Creating the Deer Resistant Garden

By Claire Larrabee

Due to Covid-19, the Rye Driftwood Garden Club is currently not holding meetings. Please check our website at www.ryehgardenclub.org for more information. In the meantime, we hope this article about planting the deer-resistant garden will spark ideas for sprucing up your garden this spring.

What a lovely sight in the early morning mists when a deer steps out of the woodland. Unfortunately, for those of us with gardens, the sight of deer provokes a love-hate relationship. Beautiful, yes, but so destructive to our beloved trees, shrubs and flowers! As spring approaches and we consider plants to add to our landscape, it's important to consider how well they can stand up to the far too many deer that lurk in our Seacoast woods and marshes.

Fortunately, there are many plants that are not only lovely to live with, but can withstand the munching onslaught. Here is a short list of deer-resistant evergreens and shrubs based on my experience as a long-term gardener.

- Rhododendron – Most rhododendron varieties are the equivalent of deer catnip. One variety that deer don't like is the Catawba rhody (*Rhododendron catawbiense*). Native to the Eastern U.S., these get very large – up to 10-15 feet in height, so give them room to grow.
- Exbury Hybrid Azaleas – Real stars in my spring garden are the Exbury azaleas. These are deciduous, so they provide no tempting leaves during the winter to entice deer. If you enjoy show-stopping, neon color in orange, yellow, peach and red, you can't go wrong with Exburies.
- Evergreen Trees – Deer dislike the taste and feel of many evergreens. The exceptions to this rule are yew and too-common arborvitae, so leave these at the nursery. Spruces, firs and junipers are usually deer resistant. There are now so many gorgeous evergreens available in all sizes, textures and colors, that it's easy to find something just right for your garden. For example, consider the compact, silver-tipped Horstman's Silberlocke Korean fir (*Abies koreana* 'Horstmann's Silberlocke'). Or, for a real statement, try a Weeping Norway Spruce (*Picea Abies Pendula*).
- Deciduous Shrubs – One of my favorite deer-resistant flowering shrubs is the easy-care Weigela, which come in a wide variety of leaf and flower color from the almost black leaf of Black Minor to the variegated species with white and green leaves topped by light pink flowers. Doublefile viburnum, deutzia, shrub roses, sweet-scented daphnes, forsythia, Korean azalea, peonies, and butterfly bush are also good choices. For interesting non-flowering shrubs, I love shrub willows, such as the white, pink and green dappled **Salix 'Hakuro Nishiki'** and the Blue Leaf Artic willow which - true to its name - creates a feathery blue accent in the garden.

Pushed to it, deer will eat just about anything, so there is no guarantee any plant will survive the depredations of hungry deer. But when you take into consideration the deer resistance of the many

plants to be found at our local nurseries, you at least stand a fighting chance of maintaining a beautiful garden year-round.

Hortzmann Silberlocke maintains its silver-tipped needles all year.



Deutzia gracillis is an easy-to-grow shrub that does well in sun or shade.



Exbury Azaleas come in a variety of neon colors to brighten any garden.



The dappled foliage of the willow, Salix "Hakuro Nishiki", provides an interesting focal point in the garden.

