

# Deer-Resistant Designs

Part 2: Shade

By Helen Newling Lawson

**Tired of planting – and replanting – your “deer buffet”?** Hungry deer are hard to deter, and in a pinch they will eat just about anything. But if you stick with plants that taste bad, feel bad, or make *them* feel bad, you might stay off their list of favorite all-night diners.

You can design not just one, but multiple areas using plants deer don't like.

Last month we provided you with choices for a planting bed in full sun. This month, we have a design that works in shade. As if that wasn't enough, it can also handle the dry shade that occurs when leaf canopy and root competition from neighboring trees conspire against your plants' water needs.

Just like last month, we have choices in each of the following categories: a small

tree or large shrub; an evergreen shrub; a perennial; a grass (or plant with grass-like foliage); a bulb or rhizome; an annual; and a ground cover. Each has been chosen for similar growing requirements (and of course, deer resistance). They also all look good together: This plan is unified by shades of red and bronze and brightened by gold accents. Last but not least, there is something of interest in every season.

**Foliage plant: Autumn fern (*Dryopteris erythrosora*) – Another highly reliable performer in dry, deer-riddled locations, although it needs watering in periods of drought. New fronds emerge bronze and stay evergreen all winter. Cut them back next spring to make way for fresh foliage. Credit: Helen Newling Lawson**



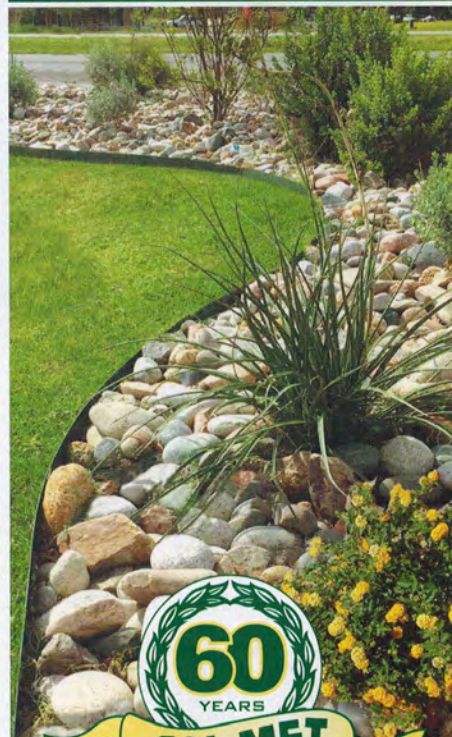


**Small tree: Red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*)** – This Southeastern native can grow into a densely branched small tree in full sun, but in the shaded understory it has a more open, shrub-like habit. Hummingbirds love its red flowers. A deep taproot makes it difficult to transplant, so think carefully about placement before planting. Seeds are poisonous.  
Credit: Helen Newling Lawson

**Evergreen shrub: Miss Scarlett anise (*Illicium floridanum* 'JJC')** – This new introduction was the inspiration for this combination, thanks to its scarlet red flowers and ability to tolerate deep shade. Like other *Illicium*, its licorice-scented evergreen leaves (giving it its common name, anise) don't suit deer. It also stays more compact than the species, approximately 4 feet tall and wide. Credit: Courtesy of Southern Living Plant Collection



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Perennial: Winter Glow bergenia (*Bergenia cordifolia* 'Winterglut') – I admit I'm partial to this one for its common name, pigsqueak, which refers to the noise that comes from rubbing its thick, leathery leaves. This same quality makes it unappealing to deer. Rosy red flowers in spring coordinate well with the *Epimedium* and its reddish bronze winter leaf color keeps interest going all year. Credit: Walters Gardens, Inc.



Annual: Catalina White Linen wishbone flower (*Torenia* 'DANCAT153') – A great alternative to *Impatiens* in dry shade, wishbone flower thrives in heat and poor soil, blooms non-stop all summer without deadheading, and has moderate deer resistance. The bunnies have been known to chomp it in my garden, but it has bounced back from its “shearing” with more flowers. (Also available in shades of blue, pink, and purple for other planting combinations.) Credit: Courtesy of Proven Winners [www.provenwinners.com](http://www.provenwinners.com)

Ground cover: *Epimedium* – This native plant only looks delicate. Dainty flowers emerge in early spring on this slowly spreading ground cover, followed by heart-shaped, red-tinged leaves. Try *Epimedium* x *rubrum* for pinkish red flowers or *E. x versicolor* 'Sulphureum' for yellow flowers (shown here with fall leaf color). Deer haven't touched it in my garden, and it survived last year's drought with virtually no supplemental water. Credit: Helen Newling Lawson



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**Bulb or rhizome:** Sacred lily (*Rohdea japonica*) – One of those little-known plants that earns rave reviews. Rutgers Gardens named this rhizomatous evergreen perennial its 2013 Plant of the Year for its “exceptional qualities,” including resistance to drought and deer browse. The wide strap-like leaves make it a great substitute for *Hosta*, and bright red spikes of berries give it winter interest. Credit: Erica Glasener, Gibbs Gardens



**Bulb:** Daffodil (*Narcissus* spp.) – Shown: ‘Tripartite’ from Brent & Becky’s Bulbs. Deer avoid all types of daffodils, which are toxic to both them and humans. Place these spring bloomers where other plants can hide the foliage as it withers away in the summer heat. Credit: National Garden Bureau

**Grass:** EverColor ‘Eversheen’ *Carex oshimensis* – Not a true grass, carex is a tough-as-nails option that handles drought, deer, and shade. Many varieties would work well in this combination, including other options in the EverColor line, the native *C. appalachica*, and *C. tumulicola*, but we like this one for the way it brightens a shady corner and picks up the color of the *Torenia*. Credit: Courtesy of Southern Living Plant Collection



We’ll leave the specific plant placement up to you, including how many of each to plant. We’ve also made two suggestions for bulbs in case the *Rohdea* is hard to find – feel free to plant them both!👉

Helen Newling Lawson is a freelance writer, marketing professional, and master gardener extension volunteer.

**CORRECTION:**

In Part 1 of *Deer-Resistant Designs* in the February issue two photos were misidentified. On page 45, the top right photo was labeled as *Ageratum*, but should have been identified as *Ajuga reptans* ‘Black Scallop’. On page 46, the top left photo should have been identified as *Guara*.