



THE GRAINETHUMB IS BAMBI IN YOUR GARDEN?

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*Dealing with these garden marauders requires a
varied strategy and vigilance* ---Carole Ottesen



A few years ago an almost timeless book called *50 Beautiful Deer-Resistant Plants: The Prettiest Annuals, Perennials, Bulbs, and Shrubs that Deer Don't Eat* by Ruth Rogers Clausen was published by Timber Press (2011). Perhaps you have seen lists of deer-resistant plants but a list is still a list and they do not have color photos or any explanation. This is akin to an adult saying to a child – NO! Oftentimes followed up with “Because I said so.” Lists of deer-resistant plants have been around for a long time; however, they are only a starting point. Clausen’s book provides an abundance of information on many plant types that will do a lot more for you than merely thrive in our area of the country especially if you follow her suggestions. If this book has a downside it is because her selection is limited to 50 plants. On the plus side, given the basic rationale for those plants, you can have a greater selection of plants in addition to those that are featured in the book. It is fair to point out that there is practically no plant that is immune from a hungry deer especially during a harsh winter season when available food is limited.

The title and sub-title of Clauson’s “guide book” is self-explanatory. About 30 pages of introductory remarks in the more than 200 pages set the scene concerning the Bambi syndrome and provide important information on:

- Tell-tale signs of deer traffic in order to take precautions before serious damage occurs
- Seasonal times to expect high deer pressure
- Commonly used controls such as a physical barrier (e.g., fencing and netting of various heights and types)
- Commercially available deer repellents and home remedies
- How to design a deer resistant garden
 - Characteristics of plants that deer avoid
 - Plant barriers (e.g., dense tall shrubs)
 - Change the terrain
 - Cultural techniques

It is often said that garden problems start with the environment. This could include the soil, not enough sun, drought, insect pests and plant diseases. Unfortunately for many gardeners these are not the biggest problems because the deer population continues to increase. Consider yourself lucky if you do not have a deer problem. The number of these doe-eyed animals keeps increasing because the only “predator” in our area is the automobile. For sure they barely make a dent (pardon the pun) in the increasing deer population. That being said, the best method for an anti-deer approach is to grow deer resistant plants.

The key to keeping your garden reasonably safe is to plant unappetizing plants. This does not preclude deer nibbling (read tasting) some plants when they would prefer to eat something else. By reading the important introductory material noted above you will have a better grasp on what you are dealing with and how to cope with the problem. This will help you to understand and work around deer behavior and thus give you a sense of the variety of methods gardeners can use in an attempt to deter the deer.

The book is arranged alphabetically by plant type – annuals, perennials, etc. including full color photos of each plant that could double as calendar art. A tight editorial approach is designed so that you will have a “quick look” about each plant hardiness zone, height and spread and a deer resistance rating on a scale of 7-10. Why only 7-10? Because plants rated lower than 7 and regularly browsed by deer are not included in the book. This ranking system limits the plants from those of which deer generally eat buds and flowers but usually leave the foliage. The Grainthumb has experienced this behavior on his daylilies...grrr. Other popular plants are seldom touched, e.g., boxwood. In addition to this basic and limited information, the heart of the book includes an expanded read on how to grow the plant, design tips for that specific plant and companion plants. Also, you will find that sidebar comments for each plant are another good editorial touch.

Like it or not, deer are here to stay and as the bumper sticker says, co-exist. Have no fear. You can garden with deer. Good luck!