

# RABBITS AND DEER



Hungry rabbits and deer will munch on just about any plant they come across which can be a continual frustration to gardeners. Thankfully, there are some types of plants that are less appealing to them. For the most part, they tend to steer clear of plants that have a sticky, rough or hairy surface. Similarly, plants with fragrant leaves or spines tend to dissuade rabbits and deer from feeding on them as well. However, keep in mind that there is always a chance that rabbits or deer will feast on less appealing plants if they are starving and have no other options.

Below is a list of some rabbit and deer resistant perennials, shrubs and trees that are well suited to the growing conditions found in the Guelph area. Potentially invasive or aggressive plants is indicated by (\*) while plant groups with a native species occurring in Ontario are indicated with (n).

## PERENNIALS

Acanthus (Bear's Breeches)  
Aconitum (Monk's Hood)  
Agastache (Anise Hyssop) <sup>n</sup>  
Amsonia (Blue Star) <sup>n</sup>  
Aquilegia (Columbine) <sup>n</sup>  
Arabis (Rock Cress)  
Aruncus (Goat's Beard) <sup>n</sup>  
Asclepias (Milkweed) <sup>n</sup>  
Astilbe  
Baptisia (Blue False Indigo) <sup>n</sup>  
Bergenia (Elephant Ears)  
Brunnera (Siberian Bugloss)  
Cerastium (Snow in Summer)  
Cimicifuga (Bugbane) <sup>n</sup>  
Coreopsis (Tickseed) <sup>n</sup>  
Dianthus (Pinks)  
Dicentra (Bleeding Heart) <sup>n</sup>  
Digitalis (Foxglove)  
Echinops (Globe Thistle)  
Epimedium (Barrenwort)  
Eremurus (Foxtail Lily)  
Eryngium (Sea Holly)  
Eupatorium (Joe Pye Weed) <sup>n</sup>

Euphorbia (Spurge)  
Filipendula (Meadowsweet)  
Gaillardia (Blanket Flower) <sup>n</sup>  
Geranium (Crane's Bill) <sup>n</sup>  
Geum (Avens) <sup>n</sup>  
Helenium <sup>n</sup>  
Helleborus (Lenten Rose)  
Heuchera (Coral Bells)  
Heucherella (Foamy Bells)  
Hosta  
Iris  
Kniphofia (Red Hot Poker)  
Lamium (Dead Nettle)  
Lavandula (Lavender)  
Leucanthemum (Shasta Daisy)  
Liatris (Blazing Star) <sup>n</sup>  
Lupinus (Lupin) <sup>n</sup>  
Miscanthus (Maiden grass)  
Monarda (Beebalm) <sup>n</sup>  
Nepeta (Cat Mint) \*  
Origanum (Oregano) \*  
Osmunda (Cinnamon/Royal Fern)  
Paeonia (Peony)

Papaver (Poppy)  
Penstemon (Beard Tongue) <sup>n</sup>  
Perovskia (Russian Sage)  
Polygonatum (Soloman's Seal) <sup>n</sup>  
Primula (Primrose)  
Pulmonaria (Lungwort)  
Rudbeckia (Black-eyed Susan) <sup>n</sup>  
Salvia (Sage)  
Saxifraga (Saxifrage)  
Sedum (Stonecrop)  
Sisyrinchium (Blue-eyed Grass) <sup>n</sup>  
Stachys (Lamb's Ear)  
Thalictrum (Meadow Rue) <sup>n</sup>  
Thymus (Thyme)  
Tiarella (Foamflower) <sup>n</sup>  
Tradescantia (Spiderwort) <sup>n</sup>  
Tricyrtis (Toad Lily)  
Verbascum (Mullein)  
Verbena (Vervain) <sup>n</sup>  
Vinca (Periwinkle) \*

## SHRUBS

Aldus sp. (Alder's) <sup>n</sup>  
Berberis (Barberry)  
Buxus (Boxwood)  
Chaenomeles (Flowering Quince)  
Cornus sp. (Dogwood's) <sup>n</sup>

Cotinus (Smoke Bush)  
Cotoneaster  
Forsythia  
Hamamelis (Witch Hazel) <sup>n</sup>  
Ligustrum (Privet)

Rosa (Rose) <sup>n</sup>  
Sambucus (Elderberry) <sup>n</sup>  
Syringa (Lilac)  
Viburnum <sup>n</sup>  
Weigela

## BULBS

Allium sp. (Flowering Onion)  
Arisaema triphyllum (Jack in the Pulpit) <sup>n</sup>  
Chionodoxa forbesii (Glory of the Snow)

Colchicum sp. (Fall Crocus)  
Fritillaria sp.  
Galanthus nivalis (Snow Drop)  
Muscari armeniacum (Grape Hyacinth)

Narcissus sp. (Daffodil)  
Puschkinia scilloides (Striped Squill)  
Scilla siberica (Siberian Squill)

## TREES

Betula sp. (Birch) <sup>n</sup>  
Catalpa sp. <sup>n</sup>  
Celtis (Hackberry) <sup>n</sup>  
Cercis canadensis (Redbud) <sup>n</sup>  
Corylus sp. (Hazel) <sup>n</sup>  
Fraxinus sp. (Ash) <sup>n</sup>

Ginkgo biloba (Maidenhair tree)  
Gledistia triacanthos (Honeylocust) <sup>n</sup>  
Juniperus sp. (Juniper)  
Larix sp. (Larch) <sup>n</sup>  
Liriodendron tulipifera (Tuliptree) <sup>n</sup>

Ostrya virginiana (Ironwood) <sup>n</sup>  
Picea sp. (Spruce) <sup>n</sup>  
Quercus sp. (Oak) <sup>n</sup>  
Tsuga canadensis (Eastern Hemlock) <sup>n</sup>

## Barriers and Repellents

By carefully selecting plants for the garden, one can greatly decrease the incidents of rabbit or deer problems within the garden. There are no rabbit or deer proof plants and if they are still munching away on any of the plants listed about, maybe trying some physical barriers or non-toxic repellents can help to keep them away from the garden.

### BARRIERS

Physical barriers are an effective way to keep hungry rabbits and deer away from plants. Fences are the more expensive option but can be very effective against deer if built properly. For rabbits, a simple enclosure of netting around the plants can do the trick to keep them away from desired plants. In protecting specific plants, barriers of at least 2.5m high for deer is required while rabbits require barriers of at least 0.5m. Similarly, the base of sapling trees can be protected with tree sleeves to protect the young stems from animal damage during the winter months!

### REPELLENTS

Repellents play on the senses of rabbits and deer. These can include methods that affect the sight, smell, taste or hearing of the bothersome animals which cause them to leave. As rabbits and deer are prey for other animals, they are constantly on the lookout for danger and it is to this factor that repellents play towards. When using repellents, keep in mind pets and/or children when choosing what type to use and keep it safe if pets or children are a concern. Finally, to keep rabbits and deer from getting desensitized, use a variety of different repellents and change the locations every once and a while; this will increase the repellents effectiveness thereby saving your garden.

#### Smell

Smell based repellents are usually the most effective. These are normally used to give rabbits and deer the idea that there are predators nearby thus causing them to vacate the area. Simply spread blood meal or nylon bags full of human/dog hair around the garden to give them the impression predators are near. Alternatively, other strong smells can be used to disguise plants that rabbits or deer love to eat. Garlic, chilli powder and rotten eggs can be used effectively in this way.

#### Taste

Similarly, spraying plants with a mixture designed to make them taste bad can be effective as well. Garlic, chilli pepper and rotten eggs are an unpleasant smell as well as taste and mixtures made up and applied to the surface of the leaves can deter most rabbits and deer from browsing the plants. See below for how to make up your own taste repellent mixture. Unfortunately, the sprays must be reapplied every week and cannot be used on vegetables as it will make them unpleasant for the kitchen table as well.

*\*To make your own repellent mixture, combine 2 tbsp hot chilli sauce, 1 tbsp liquid dish soap and 1 tsp garlic powder or puree in 3.5 litres of water. Mix well and spray the leaves of the plants reapplying after rain or after about a week.*

*\*\*An alternative mixture can be made by combining equal parts milk, water, a few eggs and 2 tbsp liquid dish soap in a blender, leaving it for a few days to build the odour and then applying to plants as mentioned above.*

**Visual/Audio** These repellents try spooking already nervous animals into leaving the area. The old fashion scare crow works on this idea and has been modernized with motion detectors that trigger lights or sounds to turn on as animals pass by. To increase effectiveness, making devices that move and create noise in the wind and moving them every now and then will keep rabbits and deer from becoming accustomed to the sights and sounds.

**Example:** Prickly Pear is an example of a deer resistant plant & is the only cactus native to Ontario.

