

# Oh, Deer! Un-munchable Natives

WE ALL KNOW HOW DISCOURAGING IT can be to add a new “deer resistant” plant to your garden only to have it quickly nibbled away. In areas where deer pressure is high, many gardeners end up falling down the rabbit hole of internet searches providing list after list of deer resistant plants. How can so many plants be resistant? Unfortunately, many of the plants advertised as “resistant” are often just “tolerant” of deer browse. The difference is significant. The term **resistant** means that the plant has physical and/or chemical properties that prevent deer from eating it. Traits like strong fragrance (i.e., mint), irritating hairs (i.e., prickly pear cactus), and toxic chemicals in the leaf and/or stem tissues (i.e., milkweed) are all natural deterrents. In contrast, the term **tolerant** means that the plant may get nibbled but has the ability to bounce back, regrow, and sometimes even still flower. These plants tend not to be a preferred food source for deer. Here at Jenkins, we have experimented with many species along our roadsides and natural areas and have observed several that fall into each category.

Adjacent is a list of both woody and herbaceous plants that we can say are truly “resistant.” There is one caveat. We have all heard that deer will eat *anything* if they’re hungry enough. This may or may not be true; it’s hard to imagine a deer would eat mint. There are, however, a couple of scenarios where a resistant plant might still get munched. Young fawns, for example, will eat plants they haven’t learned to avoid. We’ve even seen fawns eat ferns! Older deer may also nibble at a plant that is new to the garden and unfamiliar to them. Often, these new plants come from the garden center with temptingly fresh new growth; how could they possibly resist? Neither case is common, but may happen from time to time. Regardless, the plants will bounce back and should still grow well.

## 20 Reliably Deer Resistant Native Plants

### TREES & SHRUBS

#### MAGNOLIA SPECIES

*Magnolia* spp.

#### ST. JOHN'S WORT SPECIES

*Hypericum* spp.

#### BOTTLEBRUSH BUCKEYE

*Aesculus parviflora*

#### PAWPAW

*Asimina triloba*

#### RIVER BIRCH

*Betula nigra*

#### BAYBERRY SPECIES

*Myrica* and *Morella* spp.

#### CORALBERRY/SNOWBERRY

*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus* and *Symphoricarpos albus*

#### FLORIDA ANISE TREE

*Illicium floridanum*

#### DOGHOBBLE

*Leucothoe fontanesiana* and *Leucothoe axillaris*

#### FRAGRANT SUMAC

*Rhus aromatica*

### PERENNIALS

#### MOUNTAIN MINT SPECIES

*Pycnanthemum* spp.

#### ANISE HYSSOP

*Agastache foeniculum*

#### MILKWEED SPECIES

*Asclepias* spp.

#### BLUESTAR SPECIES

*Amsonia* spp.

#### SKULLCAP SPECIES

*Scutellaria* spp.

#### WILD BLEEDING HEART

*Dicentra eximia*

#### IRISES

*Iris* spp.

#### GOLDEN RAGWORT

*Packera aurea* and *Packera obovata*

#### WILD SENNA

*Senna marilandica* and *Senna hebecarpa*

#### VIRGINIA BLUEBELLS

*Mertensia virginica*

NOTE: Ferns and grasses are also highly deer resistant.