



Gardening Among Hungry Mammals 2021

This handout accompanies a Humane Gardener presentation on gardening among hungry mammals, especially deer and rabbits. Except for the herbs in the “barrier border” section, all the plants listed are native to the mid-Atlantic, and many are native to much of the Eastern U.S. Note that every environment is different, and what mammals eat depends on context: time of year, what else is growing in your garden and in the local community, abundance and placement of plants, etc.

The plants are divided into two categories: “botanical deterrents,” or those plants that aren’t as tasty (and sometimes even repellent) to mammals; and “tasty but resilient plants” that are easy to share with herbivores. Along with plant selection, you can also employ creative planting strategies, which I detail in my presentations as well as in some of the articles listed below. Diversity is key; plants don’t grow in single-species straight lines. Mix it up, experiment with your own combinations, and watch the magic happen! The rewards of sharing your garden are many.

Botanical deterrents

These native plants are less likely to be of interest to nibbling mammals, but they provide shelter for them and have high value as a food and shelter resource for other wildlife.

Tall to medium-height wildflowers

Boneset (*Eupatorium serotinum*)
Maryland senna (*Senna marilandica*)
Wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*)
Bee balm (*Monarda didyma*)
Woodland sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*)
Common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)
Dense blazing star (*Liatris spicata*)
Giant yellow hyssop (*Agastache nepetoides*)

Shorter wildflowers for the border edge

Aromatic aster (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*)
Mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*)
Blue mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*)
Wild basil (*Clinopodium vulgare*)
Blue waxweed (*Cuphea viscosissima*) – annual
Butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*)

Groundcovers

Golden ragwort (*Packera aurea*)
Elephant’s foot (*Elephantopus carolinianus*)

Pussytoes (*Antennaria* spp.)
Robin’s plantain (*Erigeron pulchellus*)
Clearweed (*Pilea pumila*) - annual
False nettle (*Boehmeria cylindrica*)
White avens (*Geum canadense*)
Wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*)
Barren strawberry (*Waldsteinia fragarioides*)
Canada anemone (*Anemone canadensis*)

Ferns, sedges, and grasses

Ostrich fern (*Mattencia struthiopteris*)
Hayscented fern (*Dennstaedtia punctilobula*)
Sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*)
Sea oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*)
Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*)
Tufted hairgrass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*) – evergreen
Broomsedge (*Andropogon virginicus*)
Appalachian sedge (*Carex appalachica*)

Shrubs & Vines

Shrubby St. John’s wort (*Hypericum prolificum*)
Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*)

Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)
Virgin's bower (*Clematis virginiana*)
Coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*)

Trees

American holly (*Ilex americana*)

Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)
Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)

Herbs for “barrier border” in veg or other garden

Lavender and rosemary (not native)
Garlic, onions, chives (not native)

Tasty but resilient plants

These native plants are often nibbled by deer, rabbits and/or other mammals, yet they are hardy and well-adapted to herbivory and make excellent buffers as well as pollinator and bird plants. They often sprout on their own in gardens and lawns. Plants that are easy to share include those that spread and seed prolifically and those that are resilient in the face of browsing.

Tall or medium wildflowers

Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*)
Common evening primrose (*Oenothera biennis*)
Goldenrods (*Solidago* spp. – many kinds, but Canada goldenrod is a favorite for nibblers)
Brown-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia triloba*)
Swamp sunflowers (*Helianthus angustifolius*)
Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)
Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*) - annual

Shorter wildflowers

Fleabane (*Erigeron annuus* and *E. philadelphicus*) - annuals
Partridge pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*) - annual
**I also recommend mixing in tall tasty perennials at the edge of the border or pathway – or simply leaving them there when they reseed – because animals often browse them and induce a shorter, bushier habit.*

Groundcovers

Common blue violet (*Viola sororia*)
Wild strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*)

Enchanter's nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*)
Golden alexander (*Zizia aurea*)

Grasses & Sedges

Nimblewill grass (*Muhlenbergia schreberi*)
Purpletop grass (*Tridens flavus*)
Eastern woodland sedge (*Carex blanda*)

Shrubs & Vines

Virginia rose (*Rosa virginiana*)
Black raspberry (*Rubus occidentalis*)
Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*)
Silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum*)
Bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*)
Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*)
Grapevines (*Vitis* spp.)
Virginia creeper vine (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)
(which can also be a groundcover)

Trees

Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)
Staghorn Sumac (*Rhus typhina*)

Resources for coexisting with mammals

- “Gardening for Deer”: humanegardener.com/gardening-for-deer
- “Deer Eat My Garden—and It Flourishes”: <https://www.humanesociety.org/news/deer-eat-my-garden-and-it-flourishes>
- “Gardening with Rabbits”: humanegardener.com/gardening-with-rabbits
- “Squirrels: Nature’s Real Gardeners”: humanegardener.com/squirrels-natures-real-gardeners
- “Moles: Underground Wonders”: humanegardener.com/moles-underground-wonders
- “The Misunderstood Coyote”: <https://www.humanesociety.org/news/misunderstood-coyote>
- *Wild Neighbors* book by John Hadidian: animalsbeltering.org/page/wild-neighbors-book
- *The Wildlife-Friendly Vegetable Gardener* book by Tammi Hartung
- *The Humane Gardener* book by Nancy Lawson

- Wild Neighbors how-tos, Humane Society of the United States, humanesociety.org/wildneighbors

Websites for identifying plants and learning floral/faunal association:

- iNaturalist: inaturalist.org. Download the app on your phone to take pictures, upload them, and receive potential identification matches within seconds.
- Illinois Wildflowers: www.illinoiswildflowers.info
- Go Botany: <https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/>
- Forest Service/USDA Fire Effects Information System: www.feis-crs.org/feis/
- Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center: www.wildflower.org/plants
- Maryland Biodiversity Project: www.marylandbiodiversity.com

Resources for exclusion products and advice

- Garden Commander moveable cages, gardencommander.com
- I Must Garden repellents, imustgarden.com
- The Beaver Institute, <http://beaverinstitute.org/>