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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

What We'll Do for A Buck

By Cynthia Brian



Oh Deer... Photos Cynthia Brian

The back gate had been left open. He walked right in to help himself to dinner leaving his telltale droppings and the roses beheaded. "Bummer," I whispered to myself as I locked the gate, satisfied that he would not return to devour my prized agapanthus.

The next evening as I went outside to check the nightlights, I thought I saw the gigantic buck in my upper garden. When I blinked, he was gone. "I'm being paranoid," I thought to myself. "There's no way a deer could jump this eight foot fence."

Wrong!

Making my morning flower rounds, there he stood in my cutting garden, proud as a Poppa, fearless of my presence. He gazed at me with those huge brown eyes as if to say, "Hi Cynthia! Aren't I smart. I came to visit you!"

I was stunned to see him inside my high walls. In case he could understand me, I shouted at him to get out as I ran to open the locked gate. For a moment he didn't budge, then, ever so slowly he ambled to the formal rose garden and with one effortless leap, hurdled the fence.

Years ago I purposely planted extra crops outside the

barrier to make sure that our enclave remained a sanctuary

for my private plantings. This season, two bucks along with a doe and her twins have been dining on the plums, prunes, apricots, apples, and Asian pears in the orchard. They pay me no heed when I'm weeding as they munch away. As long as they stay outside my interior boundaries, I am happy to co-exist with them. I reason that the wildlife inhabited this region first, while I'm the interloper. Although we are surrounded by open space with all the endemic feral animals roaming the hills and visiting our pastures, in the more than two decades that we've lived here, no creature has ever traversed the fence.

This was TROUBLE in all capitals.

It was time to dig into my bag of tricks. In my book, "Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul," I chronicled a humorous true story about a garden plagued by a marauding moose. I hoped to utilize a few of those antler deterrents for my uninvited buck. I began by attaching dryer sheets of Bounce on all of my major plants plus tacking them to the outside of the white pickets every six inches. The smell supposedly deters deer. I also installed waving flags and a burlap barrier on the areas where he leapt.

Didn't work. He returned for dinner that night.

Next, I bought bars of Irish Spring soap to scrape around the property. The dirt and plants smelled as fresh as the Emerald Isle. He basked in the clean fragrance of the leprechauns, leaping with glee.

The third night I installed motion detection lights. He reveled in the spotlight. The star jumped in.

The fourth night, I blasted the radio tuned to a raspy rap station. Mr. Buck grooved and pranced in my back yard.

The fifth night, frustrated, I ventured to the garden center where I met other gardeners deluged with deer. We commiserated while comparing notes. I bought several different animal repellents. Following directions, I sprinkled the granules of hot peppers and sprayed the mixture of rotten eggs formulated to drive critters away with a mild irritation to their nasal passages. The smell gagged me, but the aroma aroused him. He ate my agapanthus.

On the sixth night, I positioned wooden pallets and garbage cans around the perimeter to discourage his high jump. He's an Olympian.

One week of exasperation ended with the sprinklers spraying. He enjoyed his shower, and probably used the remaining Irish Spring soap to irritate me further.

The eighth evening I waited outside the fence until Mr. Buck ambled within a few feet of me. He was ready to spring when I roared like a mountain lion. Being a big cat was the best and least expensive solution. Hurrah, one victory for me!

My triumph was temporary.

As I write this, we are on night 14 of battling the buck. None of the prescribed remedies have worked, and the deer has become a nightly nuisance. I have yet to attempt an electric fence, but stringing fishing wire from post to post did not arrest his soaring either. Since I don't know where to buy "panther piss" and although suggested, a venison dinner is not an option, my long-term remedy is to build higher fences.

Suggestions from my dear deer ordeal:

- Don't intentionally feed the deer.
- Pick up fallen fruit from trees.
- Yell, scream, and wave your arms to keep the deer away. Once they become unafraid of you as they are of me, they may just jump your fence.
- Let your dog be the night guard.
- Water drought-resistant plants just enough to keep them alive. When they get too healthy, deer devour new growth.
- Block the paths of invading deer to confuse their routine routes.
- Before planting a plethora of new flowers, consider planting a single plant in a deer test garden. If it survives two weeks without being munched, it's probably going to be safe. What I've learned from this experience is that not only are there no deer proof plants, but in our area, like us, deer are gourmet foodies.
- The only guaranteed full proof resolution is to build a fence tall enough that deer can't catapult over it.

Here's a list of the major plants eaten. If you have a population of deer on your property, don't plant these or plan on putting chicken wire or netting around them.

- Gladioli
- Agapanthus
- Asiatic Lilies
- Roses
- Hydrangeas
- Firecracker Lily
- Blueberries
- Cherry tree leaves
- Dahlias
- Grapes
- Mock orange
- Fuchsia
- Camellias
- Johnson Blue Geraniums
- Jacobina
- Bergenia
- Purple Loosestrife
- Wisteria
- Sweet Potato
- Hollyhocks
- Mexican Primrose

These are the plants touted as extremely deer resistant, but my antlered visitor ate them, to my surprise.

- Osteospermum
- Marigolds
- Gaura
- Snapdragons
- Lamium
- Purple Loosestrife
- Wisteria
- Sweet Potato
- Dianthus
- Sunflowers
- Fennel

I noticed that deer on my land avoid grey leaved plant varieties. These are plants my guy didn't eat and are probably safe to plant in your garden.

- Foxglove
- Lavender
- Peony
- Sage
- Society Garlic
- Artemis
- New Zealand Flax
- Portulaca
- Boxwood
- Pink Bower Vine
- Begonia
- Calla Lily

- Four O'Clocks
- Yarrow
- Star Jasmine
- Muscari
- Ferns
- Naked Ladies
- Bearded Iris
- Birds of Paradise
- Ornamental grasses
- Hellebore
- Columbine
- Gazania
- Primrose
- Daffodil

Keep in mind there are no deer proof plants. As graceful and beautiful as deer are, they are extremely destructive. I was totally astonished by many of the

flowers consumed, especially since my plants are surrounded with specimens like spearmint, scented geranium, and lamb's ear that deer normally avoid. Vegetation they don't eat in my neighbor's yards, they are devouring in my garden. With no prescription for success, one size does not fit all when it comes to deterring deer. You will need to be diligent, watchful, and experiment with all the suggestions, then hope to buck the system of deer raiders.

If only we could run like deer, jump like deer, and think like deer, we could solve the grazing dilemma. As humans, we don't want a buck buddy in our fenced backyards. Although I wish he would move on to greener pastures, for now, the buck stops here.

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for August

"What you plant today, you'll reap tomorrow. Choose wisely!" Cynthia Brian

I've always believed that being a gardener is more than digging in the dirt or communing with nature. The act of gardening makes us better people as we learn invaluable lessons in humility, perseverance, consideration, trust, hard work, patience, responsibility, and faith. A gardener can't be lazy, nor be greedy. Great gardeners are friends of our good earth. Through successes as well as failures, gardeners reap miracles of nourishment, harmony, and reconciliation. With the last full month of summer sunshine, warm evenings, and long hours of daylight, go into your garden to experience the satisfaction of being an authentic caretaker of your place on this planet.

- SPREAD a blanket on the lawn and look towards the heavens in the early hours of the morning on Aug. 11, 12, and 13 for a show of shooting stars. It's the annual Perseid meteor shower, perfect for backyard viewing.
- DRY herbs by hanging bunches upside down in a dry place, like a garage or shed. Good herbs to dry include lavender, sage, thyme, rosemary, and oregano. Store the dried leaves in a jar.
- DOUSE weeds with a concoction of white vinegar and liquid dish soap. To a gallon of the vinegar, add a capful of dish soap, shake in a spray bottle, use proactively.
- GATHER the seeds of fennel and cilantro after the flowers are spent. Dry the seeds on a cooking sheet. Cilantro seeds are called coriander. Both add flavor and texture to both sweet and savory recipes.
- PRESERVE flat-leaf parsley, basil, and chives by freezing them in ice cube trays. Put a spoonful of the chopped leaves in each cell, add water, and freeze. When you want a dash of fresh flavor, pop an ice cube.
- PLANT edamame and sweet potatoes, both warm weather crops. The soil needs to be warmer than 60 degrees. Plan on harvesting edamame in 90-100 days when the pods are plump but still green for a heart healthy omega 3 boost. To make potassium rich sweet potatoes sweeter, store at 90 degrees for two weeks after harvesting,
- DEADHEAD roses, annuals, and perennials as blooms fade to keep them coming through frost.
- GROW celery by rooting the base of your store bought vegetable. Put the stub in a glass jar filled with water in a sunny location, then transplant to a container or garden when rooted.
- KEEP bugs at bay for your evening dine outs by hanging dryer softener sheets next to, but not touching, light fixtures. As the sheets heat up, the smell drives moths, mosquitoes, and other flyers away. Place a citronella plant in a container on your patio as an additional insect repellent.
- HARVEST cucumbers and make an easy spicy summer snack as well as soothing eye pack. Peel, slice, add red onions, rice vinegar, and marinate for one hour in the refrigerator. Save the peels to place on your eyes to eliminate puffiness after swimming.
- COLOR your world with a bed of brightly hued zinnias. They are great for arrangements and cutting.
- RE-PURPOSE old pantyhose by using the seat to protect big watermelons and squash on the vines. The legs can be used to store bulbs or onions.
- WATCH butterflies pollinate your flowers as they flutter from blossom to blossom on monarda, tithonia, sunflowers, zinnias, butterfly bush, cosmos, alyssum, marigolds, thyme, oregano, and marjoram.
- EXTEND your garden's production with a second season planting of beets, scallions, kohlrabi, chard, broccoli, lettuce, peas, and carrots to carry your fresh offerings into late fall.

- TOSS a salad comprised of edible herbs, tender leaves, and fruit from your garden including basil, sage, thyme, loveage, fennel, arugula, spinach, chives, chard, tarragon, kale, beet tops, lettuce, cilantro, parsley, sorrel, apples, and plums dressed with lemon juice and olive oil for a tasty jolt of mineral rich nutrition.
- DETER deer by building fences 10 feet or higher. Send me an email if you discover ways to keep deer out without fences! Cynthia@goddessgardener.com
- MAKE jam, jelly, or wine with the beautiful blue elderberries at their peak this month.
- PICNIC on the patio where you can enjoy the beauty and scents of the hot August nights.
- SHARE your excess vegetable and fruit harvest with the neighborhood and take the extras to the local food bank for those in need to savor.

Enjoy the final days of summer with barbecues and swim parties with family and friends. School is back in session soon. Drive carefully.

Happy gardening and happy growing to you!

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Cynthia is available as a speaker and consultant.



Delicious Asian pears are a favorite fruit of deer and humans.



Cynthia's rose bush before the buck jumped the fence. Photos Cynthia Brian



The same rose bush after the deer's munching spree. Notice the dryer sheet of Bounce stuck to the stem.

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