

Lamorinda

OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly

Volume 18

Issue 16

Wednesday, Sept. 25, 2024



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Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

Dear Deer!

By Cynthia Brian



Bucks in the orchard.

Photos Cynthia Brian

"We are part of the earth, and it is part of us... the deer, the horse, the great eagle: these are our brothers." – Chief Seattle.

Now that fall has arrived, foraging deer have become a nuisance in suburban gardens. The Columbian Blacktail was abundant during the 18th century in California. The population plummeted after the Goldrush due to over-hunting for venison and rawhide. The Department of Fish and Game speculates that between 1900-1910, fewer than 300,000 deer of all species roamed the state. In 1907, deer hunting was regulated, resulting in deer residents soaring to over a million by the 1940s. The decline of the horned herbivores began when fire suppression increased, agricultural plots swelled, and wildlands became suburban developments. Yet, the dear deer acclimated to their new environment and today claim our gardens as their favorite restaurants.

As I've been busy with garden consultations this past month, the issue of deer damage continues to be a major concern. The hills are dry, edible resources have diminished, and the most inviting source of delectable treats grows in our private landscapes. Oh deer!

As a child, I remember going out into the orchards and vineyards on



The deer love agapanthus but know that oleander is poisonous.

our farm at dusk every September evening to scare the herds as they could easily devour a year's harvest. All the methods we tried didn't work until we built fences surrounding the property.

I have always admired these beautiful, gentle creatures, and I enjoy watching the big bucks in the hills, sometimes sparring. In the spring when the mothers show their fawns where the newly sprouted green weeds are growing, I am doubly delighted. As much as I enjoy these wild, peaceful prowlers, like all gardeners, I don't want them devouring my plants.

It is essential to be clear. There is NO DEER-PROOF plant. If the animal is hungry enough, it will eat anything. The only deer-proof garden is a fenced garden. In this article, I'll share a few strategies for you to attempt. However, I reiterate, that the only foolproof method is to fence your yard. Since most people don't fence their front gardens, I am including a list of plants that deer relish munching and a list of plants they prefer not to consume, although they'll eat the new, tender shoots of most. Keep this handy list as a reference as you plan to plant.

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