

# Ornamental Plant Susceptibility to Damage by Deer in Florida<sup>1</sup>

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## General Comments

Deer have many qualities we admire and value. Deer also may become a nuisance when their feeding behaviors damage ornamental plants and gardens and cause aggravation, inconvenience, and financial costs to property owners. As human dwellings continue to increase in rural areas where deer occur, the incidence of deer-human conflicts also will increase. This is particularly true where human developments replace native habitats and reduce the availability of natural foods preferred by deer. In these instances, deer may quickly become accustomed to feeding upon gardens, ornamental plantings, groves, and nurseries. Damage from deer may be reduced by fencing and the use of chemical repellents (see Main, Schaefer, and Allen, 1999), but a simpler, less expensive, and generally more effective alternative is to landscape with plants that deer do not like to eat.

Deer will feed upon a variety of vegetation including weeds and flowers, grasses, trees, shrubs, vines, and fruits and vegetables. Deer do not eat all plants, however, and diet is influenced by plant qualities such as taste and digestibility, and individual preferences among animals. Where deer densities are high, even plants that are normally avoided may be eaten. This IFAS extension fact sheet identifies some of the ornamental plants commonly planted in Florida and their susceptibility to damage from deer. This information may be used to guide planting decisions in areas where



damage from deer is likely to be a problem. Development of this document was facilitated by a survey regarding susceptibility of commonly planted trees, shrubs, and perennials to browsing damage by deer of 71 Florida county extension agents with horticultural expertise. Thirteen counties responded to the survey, five of which provided plant species lists and eight of which reported that damage from deer was not a problem in their area.

The information provided is organized by plant growth form and is designed to assist in making decisions when

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landscaping in areas where damage from deer is likely to be a problem. All species listed are known to grow in Florida. In some cases, multiple species and varieties exist for a common name, such as Juniper (*Juniperus* spp.). In these instances, some species may be more susceptible than others and susceptibility may differ geographically. For example, the northern Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) may be severely damaged by deer in northern states.

## For Additional Information

Main, M., J.M. Schaefer and G.M. Allen. 1999. [Coping With Deer Damage in Florida](#). Extension sheet WEC-135, Dep. of Wildlife Ecology & Conservation, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, Univ. of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

Horton, J.L., and W.D. Edge. 1994. [Deer-resistant Ornamental Plants](#). Extension sheet 1440, Oregon State University Extension Service, Administrative Services A422, Corvallis, OR, 97331-2119.

Schaefer, J.M. and M.B. Main. [Florida's White-Tailed Deer](#). Extension sheet SS-WEC-11, Dep. of Wildlife Ecology & Conservation, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, Univ. of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

## Acknowledgements

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Table 1. Trees listed by susceptibility to damage from deer in Florida.

<b>Frequent or Severe Damage</b>		
<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Botanical Name</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Black cherry	<i>Prunus serotina</i>	North & central Florida
Carolina laurel cherry	<i>Prunus carolina</i>	Large quantities fatal to livestock
Crabapple	<i>Malus spp.</i>	Sapling and fruit removal
Flatwoods plum	<i>Prunus umbellata</i>	Edible fruit
Pear	<i>Pyrus spp.</i>	Sapling and fruit removal
<b>Occasional or Moderate Damage</b>		
Citrus	<i>Citrus spp.</i>	Young trees
Red maple	<i>Acer rubrum</i>	Occasionally severe damage
Schefflera	<i>Schefflera actinophylla</i>	Not resistant
White oak	<i>Quercus alba</i>	North Florida
Willow	<i>Salix spp.</i>	New growth preferred by deer
<b>Rare or Minor Damage</b>		
American beech	<i>Fagus grandiflora</i>	Resistant
Australian pine	<i>Casuarina equisetifolia</i>	Resistant
Bottlebrush	<i>Melaleuca quinquenervia</i>	Resistant
Butterfly/cabada palms	<i>Chrysalidocarpus spp.</i>	Resistant
Cabbage/palmettos	<i>Sabal spp.</i>	Resistant
Christmas palms	<i>Veitchia spp.</i>	Resistant
Coconut palm	<i>Cocos nucifera</i>	Resistant
Crape myrtle	<i>Lagerstroemia indica</i>	Resistant
Date palms	<i>Phoenix spp.</i>	Resistant
Edible fig	<i>Ficus carica</i>	Resistant
Eucalyptus	<i>Eucalyptus cinerea</i>	Resistant
Fishtail palms	<i>Caryota spp.</i>	Resistant
Flowering dogwood	<i>Cornus florida</i>	Resistant
Ligustrum	<i>Ligustrum spp.</i>	Resistant
Live oak	<i>Quercus virginiana</i>	Resistant
Loquat	<i>Eriobotrya japonica</i>	Resistant
Magnolia	<i>Magnolia spp.</i>	Resistant
Orchid tree	<i>Bauhinia variegata</i>	Resistant
Paurotis palm	<i>Acoelorrhaphe wrightii</i>	Resistant
Persimmon	<i>Diospyros spp.</i>	Resistant
Pineapple guava	<i>Feijoa spp.</i>	Resistant
Podocarpus	<i>Podocarpus spp.</i>	Resistant
Pomegranate	<i>Punica granatum</i>	Resistant
Ponytail, Bottle palm	<i>Beaucarnea recurvata</i>	Resistant
Queen palm	<i>Arecastrum romanzoffianum</i>	Resistant
Royal palm	<i>Roystonea spp.</i>	Resistant
Thatch palm	<i>Thrinax spp.</i>	Resistant
Yaupon	<i>Ilex vomitoria</i>	Resistant

Table 2. Shrubs listed by susceptibility to damage from deer in Florida.

<b>Frequent or Severe Damage</b>		
<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Botanical Name</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Bouganvillea	<i>Bouganvillea spp.</i>	Not resistant
Evergreen Azaleas	<i>Rhododendron spp.</i>	Frequently damaged
Hibiscus	<i>Hibiscus spp.</i>	Not resistant, favorite
Hog plum	<i>Prunus umbellata</i>	North Florida species
Mexican firebush	<i>Hamelia patens</i>	Not resistant
Pittosporum	<i>Pittosporum tobira</i>	Not resistant, favorite
Rhododendrons	<i>Rhododendron spp.</i>	Frequently damaged
Roses	<i>Rosa spp.</i>	Regular spraying will reduce damage
<b>Rare or Minor Damage</b>		
Banana shrub	<i>Magnolia fuscata</i>	Resistant
Bird of Paradise	<i>Strelitzia reginae</i>	Resistant
Blackberry	<i>Rubus spp.</i>	Only thorny species resistant
Bottlebrush	<i>Callistemon spp.</i>	Resistant
Camellia	<i>Camellia spp.</i>	Resistant
Carissa	<i>Carissa spp.</i>	Resistant
Chinese holly	<i>Ilex cornuta</i>	Somewhat resistant
Croton	<i>Croton linearis</i>	Resistant
Gardenia	<i>Gardenia spp.</i>	Resistant
Heavenly bamboo	<i>Nandina spp.</i>	Resistant
Ixora	<i>Ixora spp.</i>	Resistant
Japanese boxwood	<i>Buxus microphylla</i>	Resistant
Juniper	<i>Juniperus spp.</i>	Resistant
Lantana	<i>Lantana camara</i>	Natives resistant, hybrids not
Mahonia	<i>Mahonia spp.</i>	Resistant
Myrtle-leaf holly	<i>Ilex myrtifolia</i>	Resistant
Needle palm	<i>Rhopidophyllum hystrix</i>	Resistant
Oleander	<i>Nerium oleander</i>	Resistant, poisonous
Philodendron	<i>Philodendron spp.</i>	Resistant, bugs won't eat either
Plumbago	<i>Plumbago auriculata</i>	Resistant
Rutty	<i>Ruttya Ruspolia</i>	Resistant
Silver thorn	<i>Elaeagnus spp.</i>	Resistant
Southern Indian Azaleas	<i>Rhododendron spp.</i>	Resistant
Sweet/tea olive	<i>Osmanthus fragrans</i>	Resistant
Viburnum	<i>Viburnum spp.</i>	Resistant
Wax myrtle	<i>Myrica cerifera</i>	Resistant

Table 3. Vines & Ground Cover listed by susceptibility to damage from deer in Florida.

<b>Frequent or Severe Damage</b>		
<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Botanical Name</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Clematis	<i>Clematis spp.</i>	Poisonous to humans
<b>Occasional or Moderate Damage</b>		
Trumpet vine	<i>Campis radicans</i>	Central to north Florida
<b>Rare or Minor Damage</b>		
Allamanda	<i>Allamanda cathartica</i>	R Resistant
Asparagus fern	<i>Asparagus densiflorus</i>	Resistant
Aztec grass	<i>Ophiopogon japonicus</i>	Resistant
Boston fern	<i>Nephrolepis spp.</i>	Resistant
English ivy	<i>Hedera helix</i>	Resistant, poisonous to humans
Holly fern	<i>Lomariopsis kunzeana</i>	Resistant
Pampas grass	<i>Cortaderia spp.</i>	Resistant
Shield fern	<i>Dryopteris spp.</i>	Resistant
Society garlic	<i>Tulbaghia violacea</i>	Resistant
Star jasmine	<i>Trachelospermum jasminoides</i>	Will eat when under pressure
Wandering Jew	<i>Tradescantia zebrina</i>	R Resistant
Yellow jessamine	<i>Gelsemium sempervirens</i>	Resistant, poisonous to humans

Table 4. Annuals/Perennials & Bulbs listed by susceptibility to damage from deer in Florida.

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Botanical Name</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Frequent or Severe Damage</b>		
Celosia	<i>Celosia argenta</i>	Not resistant
Corn	<i>Zea mays</i>	Not resistant
Dahlias	<i>Dahlia spp.</i>	Not resistant
Day lilly	<i>Liliaceae spp.</i>	Not resistant
Impatiens	<i>Impatiens spp.</i>	Not resistant, favorite
Peas	<i>Pisum sativum</i>	Not resistant
Phlox	<i>Phlox spp.</i>	Not resistant
Portulaca	<i>Portulaca spp.</i>	Not resistant, favorite
Shrimp plant	<i>Beloperone guttata</i>	Not resistant
Star flower	<i>Trientalis borealis</i>	Not resistant
Tomatoes	<i>Lypersicon esculentum</i>	Not resistant
<b>Occasional or Moderate Damage</b>		
Aster	<i>Aster spp.</i>	Will eat when under pressure
Begonia	<i>Begonia spp.</i>	Will eat when under pressure
Iris	<i>Iris spp.</i>	Somewhat resistant
Zinnia	<i>Zinnia spp.</i>	Will eat when under pressure
<b>Rare or Minor Damage</b>		
Ageratum	<i>Ageratum spp.</i>	Resistant
Aloe	<i>Aloe spp.</i>	Resistant
Angel flower	<i>Angelonia angelonia</i>	Resistant
Angles trumpet	<i>Datura spp.</i>	Resistant
Anise	<i>Pimpinella anisum</i>	Resistant
Black-eyed Susan	<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>	Resistant
Bush daisy	<i>Gamolepis chrysanthemoides</i>	Resistant
Century plant	<i>Agave americana</i>	Resistant, poisonous to humans
Cone flower	<i>Echinacea spp.</i>	Resistant
Coreopsis/Tickseed	<i>Coreopsis spp.</i>	Resistant
Crown of thorns	<i>Euphorbia milii</i>	Resistant
Devil's trumpet	<i>Datura spp.</i>	Resistant
Dusty Miller	<i>Senecio cineraria</i>	Resistant
Ginger lilly	<i>Liliaceae spp.</i>	Resistant
Heliconia	<i>Heliconia spp.</i>	Resistant
Lilly family	<i>Dracaena spp.</i>	Resistant
Lily of the Nile	<i>Agapanthus spp.</i>	Resistant
Lupine	<i>Lupine spp.</i>	Resistant, poisonous to humans
Marigolds	<i>Dimorphotheca spp.</i>	Resistant
Peace lilly	<i>Spathiphyllum spp.</i>	Resistant
Periwinkle	<i>Vinca rosea</i>	Resistant
Petunia	<i>Ruellia spp.</i>	Resistant
Rotunda	<i>Kaempferia spp.</i>	Resistant
Sage	<i>Salvia spp.</i>	Resistant
Shasta daisy	<i>Chrysanthemum superbum</i>	Flowers may be eaten
Ti tree	<i>Cordyline terminalis</i>	Resistant
Trillium, wake robin	<i>Trillium maculatum</i>	Resistant, north Florida

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Frequent or Severe Damage</b> <b>Botanical Name</b>		<b>Comments</b>
Turks cap	<i>Malavaviscus arboreus</i>	Resistant	
Verbena	<i>Verbena spp.</i>	Resistant	
Yucca	<i>Yucca spp.</i>	Resistant	