

## Not tonight, deer Cutting garden needn't be a buffet for doe-eyed gourmands

Sandra Gorry, Special to The Chronicle  
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Let's face it: Deer are indiscriminate diners when hungry. They will eat anything -- and everything.

Some gardeners, desperate to save their perennials, flee to their local garden center to lay in a supply of deer food, only to find that those marauding foragers prefer the 'Casablanca' lilies to purchased fodder. Others religiously spray their plants with commercial deer repellants to discover those same plants chomped to the ground after a night of heavy rain. Still others surround their gardens with expensive 6-foot fencing only to realize that they should have listened to the salesman and installed the 8-foot fencing.

Clearly, the best solution is to design the garden with care, incorporating plants that are unappealing to browsing deer most times. As a rough rule of thumb, this group would include plants that are poisonous -- deer are not dummies -- or plants that are aromatic or have thorns, although the lore is packed with tales of whole rose gardens wiped out by a doe and her Bambis. Still, by choosing plants wisely, the gardener may outwit the deer and revel in a three-season cutting garden year after peaceful year.

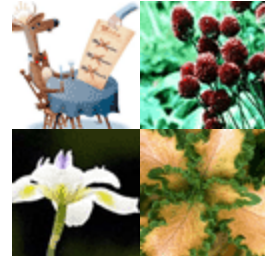
If you have an area bathed in some shade, you will enjoy spectacular cut flowers beginning in spring. In the back of your shade garden, consider planting *Digitalis purpurea* 'Excelsior' hybrids. This lovely foxglove collection thrives in rich, well-drained soil, and, although short-lived (generally two years at most), they self-sow readily -- next year you may find the offspring far from their parents. Best of all, deer won't touch them; all parts of *D. purpurea* are poisonous.

In front of the foxgloves, set aside a shady niche for a group of columbines, those dainty, long-spurred flowers whose name in Latin means "flock of doves." Select *Aquilegia McKana* hybrids for a delicate group of pastel cut flowers, tall and graceful, yet tough. All members of the columbine family want rich woodland soil with plenty of moisture and good drainage.

For different texture, tuck into that same garden some cultivars of *Astilbe arendsii*, whose feathery plumes will soften the rigid foxgloves and ground the dancing columbines. The hybrids are available in a range of shades from scarlet to rose to pale pink and white. Plant them all for a lovely bouquet of spring colors.

The final choice for a spring bloomer is the sun-loving *Gaura lindheimeri*, which produces long sprays of ethereal blossoms from spring to fall. A native of Mexico, *Gaura* tolerates heat, drought and high humidity, clearly a plant for all gardens. To stimulate blooming in future seasons, be ruthless and cut the plants right to the ground after they have flowered.

As the temperature heats up, all those summer-blooming perennials that produce fabulous cut flowers demand full sun. A hot, dry spot is perfect for *Coreopsis lanceolata*, a bright yellow daisy that blooms from late spring through summer, and if you plant a mass of these lovelies, your garden will seem awash in a sea of gold.



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One of the toughest perennials that tolerates poor, dry soil is the genus *Achillea*, named for Achilles, who relied on its medicinal properties to treat his wounded soldiers. Sadly, it failed to cure the fatal wound to his heel. With its fernlike foliage and large, flat flower heads, yarrow adds punch to any bouquet, but as with all cut flowers, strip it of its lower foliage before arranging it in water.

Another candidate for hot and dry soil is the shrubby *Santolina chamaecyparissus*, whose highly aromatic blue-gray foliage sends deer packing. Older *Santolinas* tend to get woody, so cut them back hard before the spring growth pops up, and they will reward you with a profusion of dainty yellow button flowers every spring for years.

For a garden area that receives ample moisture with good drainage, the lovely *Monarda didyma* will flourish, yielding masses of white, pink or red spiky flowers. Relished by American Indians and early colonists, who used the leaves to make tea, bee balm is much loved by bees as well, so to avoid harassment by those furry fliers set your plants far from foot traffic.

Some summer perennials need moderate water -- not too dry and not too wet -- so if your sun-drenched garden gets regular water, consider planting *Lavandula angustifolia*, English lavender, another highly scented choice. Not only do the long sprays of blue flowers add a touch of elegance to a summer bouquet, but if you dry a bunch or two and hang them in your linen closet, you will enjoy a whiff of Provence all year round.

For early summer bouquets, plant a few oriental poppies in and around some leafy perennials; poppies die back in the heat of summer, so you will want to camouflage their fading foliage. A native of southwest Asia, *Papaver orientale* bears spectacular red blossoms as large as peonies, which makes up for its short season. All poppies exude a sticky sap, so be sure to cauterize the ends of the stems in a candle flame to seal them soon after they are cut.

A good spot to hide your poppies would be to tuck them among some *Salvia nemerosa*, a tidy clumping perennial whose violet spikes continue well into fall if you are diligent and deadhead regularly. Even though deer are known to browse almost all 850 species of salvias, they generally pass on *S. nemerosa*, even avoiding a "no thank you" portion. Since salvias like their soil lean, take it easy on the fertilizer.

For a bit of whimsy in your summer bouquet, reserve a sunny spot in the garden for the frilly pincushion flower, *Scabiosa caucasica*. Available in shades of pink, lavender, blue and even white, this Caucasus native will continue blooming into late fall if the spent flowers are removed, although it is such a lovely cut flower your deadheading chores will be minimal.

The final choice for a sun-baked cutting garden is the native *Echinacea purpurea*, a stately daisylike purple coneflower topped with an orange-brown center cone that resembles a beehive. A tough perennial, tolerant of diverse conditions, *Echinacea* fusses only when disturbed, so choose its site with care.

Although you may be tempted to cut all the flowers for your bouquets, leave a few to attract monarch butterflies on their migration to warmer climes -- the purple coneflower is one of their favorites. When the petals have faded, strip them from the cones, and include just the cones for a bit of drama in your summer arrangements.

When the nights begin to lengthen, the blues reign supreme. Leading off the parade, *Veronica austriaca* bursts forth in midsummer with a blaze of brilliant blue flowers borne on the ends of slender stems. Named for St. Veronica, this European native is not choosy about soil or water but must have full sun to live up to its reputation as a profuse bloomer.

Next in the garden's time line, *Perovskia atriplicifolia* begins to show its blue spikes in late summer and continues to flower deep into fall.

A hot, dry sunny spot in the back of the garden is ideal for the Russian sage whose 5-foot gray-green foliage tops out in a haze of tiny lavender-blue blossoms. To encourage flowering and maintain control of your *Perovskia*, whack it back almost to the ground in early spring before new growth pops out.

The final choice in the procession of blues is *Aconitum napellus*. If your garden has a shady damp area like a boggy woodland or stream bank, a stand of monkshood will flourish. Known for centuries as a virulent poison -- many an ancient enemy succumbed to a refreshing mug of mead laced with *A. napellus* -- a sniff of those deep blue flowers causes deer to flee in panic. So don't eat it but do cut it for its lovely clusters of flowers ranged along tall stems to add stature to any late summer bouquet.

To soften the intensity of the blues, consider a planting of *Chrysanthemum nipponicum*, a shrubby perennial with shiny green leaves and large, brilliant white daisylike flowers. Also known as the Montauk daisy for its ability to stand up to seaside conditions, this Japanese native thrives in any soil as long as it gets sharp drainage. Since it tends to get floppy with age, cut it back halfway once strong, new spring growth has emerged.

The last fall-blooming perennial that is known to stave off browsing deer is the tall *Aster novae-angliae*. Once growing wild across broad swatches of the country, the cultivated varieties of the New England aster come in all shades of pink, adding a shot of color to your blue and white bouquet. Preferring rich moist soil and full sun, this top-heavy aster may require staking, but if you want to avoid that garden chore, plant your asters in part shade or allow the soil to dry out slightly to stunt the growth. When cutting asters for an arrangement, be sure to wear gloves, since the hairy stems have been known to cause a skin rash.

Although none of the perennials chosen for a cutting garden can be guaranteed deer-proof, extensive research has shown that the frustrated gardener may have at least a fighting chance against those cute marauders by careful selection. One final piece of advice: To lessen the impact on your wallet, don't install your perennial garden in one shot, but plant just a few of your choices, pray, and see what happens.

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#### Deer-resistant bulbs and annuals

Bulbs (including corms, tubers and rhizomes):

Agapanthus -- lily of the Nile: blue, white

Dahlias -- white, pink, yellow, orange, red

Freesia -- white, pink, yellow, orange, red (many are fragrant)

Iris -- yellow, white, purple

Fritillaria -- yellow, orange, red, maroon

Narcissus -- yellow, white

Allium -- purple, pink, white

Calla lilies -- white, yellow, pink, orange

Society garlic -- lilac, white

Scilla -- blue, purple, pink, white

Annuals:

Snapdragon -- yellow, orange, pink

Cleome -- pink, white

Nicotiana -- white, pink, red

Ageratum -- blue, lavender, pink

French and American marigolds -- white, yellow, orange, maroon

Annual verbena -- red, mauve, violet, white, pink

Zinnia -- yellow, red, orange, lilac, purple, white, green

Gomphrena -- purple, pink, yellow, orange

Gazania -- orange, yellow, pink

Coleus -- noted for its colorful foliage and shade tolerance

-- S.G.

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Some striking cultivars by color

Blue:

*Lavandula angustifolia* 'Munstead'

*Perovskia atriplicifolia* 'Blue Spire'

*Salvia nemerosa* 'Ostfriesland'

*Veronica austriaca* 'Crater Lake Blue'

*Scabiosa caucasica* 'Staefa'

Red:

*Achillea millefolium* 'Fanal'

*Achillea millefolium* 'Paprika'

*Monarda didyma* 'Cambridge Scarlet'

*Papaver orientale* 'Beauty of Livermere'

White:

Echinacea purpurea 'White Swan'

Gaura lindheimeri 'Whirling Butterflies'

Scabiosa caucasica 'Miss Wilmott'

Pink:

Veronica spicata 'Heidekind'

Echinacea purpurea 'Robert Bloom'

Achillea millefolium 'Red Beauty'

Monarda didyma 'Croftway Pink'

Papaver orientale 'Cedric Morris'

Aster novae-angliae 'Alma Potschke'

Gaura lindheimeri 'Siskiyou Pink'

Yellow:

Coreopsis lanceolata 'Baby Sun'

Achillea 'Moonshine'

Achillea 'Coronation Gold'

-- S.G.

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