

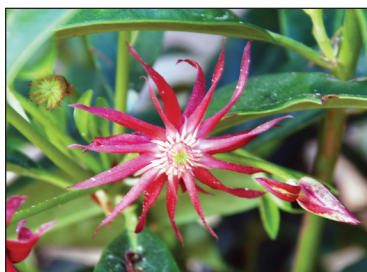


A Few Other Evergreens to Consider in Deer Country!

Vincent A. Simeone, Director, Planting Fields Arboretum (all photos courtesy of the author)

Illicium floridanum, Florida Anise Tree:

This durable evergreen is becoming more of a common inhabitant in northern gardens. It offers lustrous, dark green leaves, a dense habit to 6-10' tall and wide. The unusual, star-shaped, red flowers in spring are also attractive. This evergreen has shown very reliable deer resistance in most gardens I have observed and is also quite adaptable. It can tolerate wet soils but does best in moist, well drained, organic soils. It is also very tolerant of dense shade or full sun but looks best in partial shade. There are many good selections including 'Florida Sunshine,' with golden yellow leaves, 'Swamp Hobbit,' a low growing, dense form, and 'Woodland Ruby,' with large, red flowers that often repeat in the summer. Don't let the common name fool you: while this plant is native to the southeast, it will grow into the colder regions of zone 6.



Illicium floridanum flower



Illicium floridanum as a hedge (top), 'Woodland Ruby' (above).



***Mahonia bealei*, Leatherleaf Mahonia:** Like most relatives of the barberry family, mahonia is a resilient plant that will grow in a wide variety of situations with little fuss. Leatherleaf mahonia offers coarse, thick, spiny leaflets that deer tend to avoid. The upright, shrubby habit and bright yellow, fragrant flowers in late winter or early spring followed by egg shaped blue fruit in summer are quite attractive. Mature plants can reach over 6' tall and occasional selective pruning to remove older canes is recommended. Mahonia will adapt to most soils and light, and is especially effective in dry soils and shade. Hardy to zone 6. *Mahonia aquifolium*, Oregon Grape Holly, is hardy to zone 4. While not as rugged as leatherleaf mahonia, Oregon Grape Holly is every bit as deer resistant and very versatile. The glossy, green foliage often turns maroon in the winter. Golden yellow flowers are borne on the terminals of the branches in early spring. It can be used as a groundcover, shrub, and foundation planting. 'King's Ransom' is an upright variety reaching 5' tall.



Mahonia bealei flower (top), and in the landscape (above).

***Morella pensylvanica*,
Northern Bayberry:**

This incredibly resilient native shrub is typically semi-evergreen and is very adaptable to heat, drought, soil types and is particularly deer resistant. While this plant is mostly found in maritime conditions where its dense, spreading habit and clusters of grey fruit are prized by birds, it is also becoming more present in cultivated landscapes. Northern bayberry is dioecious, so, like *Ilex* sp., it requires a male plant to pollinate female plants in order to produce berries. Northern bayberry is an excellent formal or informal hedge or screen, and it seems the hotter and drier the environment, the better it performs. Plants can be variable and pruning to keep plants more compact and uniform is desirable as bayberry can reach 5-12' tall and wide. Bobbee™ is a more compact selection to 6-8' tall and wide. Hardy to zone 2 with protection.



Morella pensylvanica in a natural setting (above) and fruit (below).



***Osmanthus* sp., Holly Osmanthus, False Holly:**

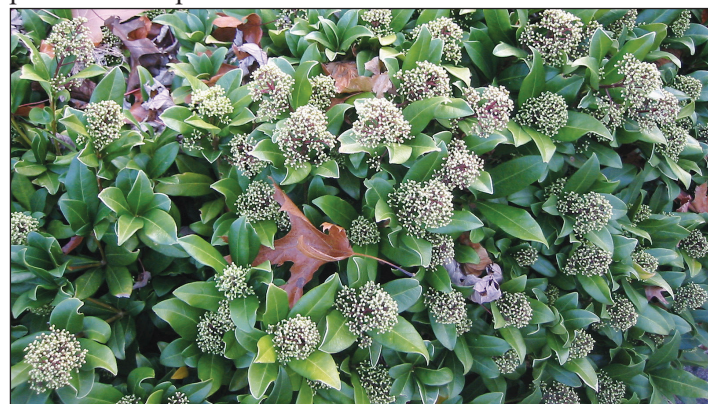
Osmanthus is emerging as a popular shrub in lower New York used as a hedge, screen, and foundation planting in high deer pressure areas. However, *Osmanthus heterophyllus* is listed on the tier 3 invasive species list by LIISMA. As an alternative species, I would suggest trying *Osmanthus x fortunei* which is also in the trade and is not currently on the invasive species list. This bold,



Osmanthus foliage.

dense grower is effective as a hedge and offers very dark green, holly-like foliage and adapts well to many landscape environments. In the fall plants will offer creamy white flowers that are intoxicatingly fragrant. Hardy to zone 6.

***Skimmia japonica*, Japanese Skimmia:** Another dioecious plant with female plants displaying smaller flower clusters but bunches of bright red berries in winter. Male plants have much larger flower clusters than the female plants and together they make a potent combination. As a relative of the citrus family, *Skimmia* is tough and can grow in shade or sun. Moist, well drained, acidic soil with plenty of organic matter is preferred. Excellent as a mass planting, edging plant or foundation planting. Hardy from zone 6 to 9; may experience winter burn in northern climates so provide some protection.



Skimmia japonica flowers (top) and form (above).

***Picea orientalis*, Oriental Spruce:**

Spruce in general is known to be relatively deer resistant, most species having sharp, dense foliage that is likely only vulnerable to deer when the foliage emerges in the spring. Oriental spruce is considered the best of the best in terms of spruce as it offers a graceful habit, very dark green, petite needles, and interesting strawberry-like male flowers in spring. It is tolerant of most soils if



Picea orientalis 'Skylands' foliage..

they are well drained and can thrive in full sun or partial shade. They are also tolerant of heat and drought once established. This species is ideal as a single specimen or tall screen on large sites. While mature specimens can reach over 60' in height, this species is slow growing and there are several cultivars that are more suited for residential landscapes. 'Gowdy' is an established variety reaching 10-15' tall. 'Skylands' is a striking golden form with a narrow, conical habit. 'Bergmen's Gem' grows very much like a Birds' Nest Spruce with a compact, rounded habit to 6' tall.



Picea orientalis 'Skylands' (top) and male flowers (above).

***Pinus bungeana*, Lacebark Pine:** This fine, elegant pine is a specialty item that is a bit more difficult to find in commerce than white pine or mugo pine, but its ornamental attributes and low-maintenance qualities are worth the effort. This three-needle pine is a slow grower with short, dark green needles and a dense, shrubby habit that becomes more upright and broader over time. But lacebark pine's best attribute is the multicolored, exfoliating bark offering shades of green, brown, and white, like a planetree. Plants



Pinus bungeana



can eventually grow 30-50' tall and about half the width but generally smaller in colder climates. Lacebark pine performs best in full sun or partial shade and well drained soils. It is tolerant of high pH soils and drought as well. I suspect due to the stiff, rigid needles, they are not a favorite of deer. 'Silver Ghost' offers silvery gray bark at a young age and 'Temple Gem' is a slower growing, compact form for residential landscapes. Hardy to zone 4 with winter protection.



Pinus bungeana form (top) and bark (above).

***Thuja plicata*, Western Arborvitae:** Western arborvitae is a native to the Pacific Northwest and one that I feel is better suited for our landscapes than American arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*), Leyland cypress and other commonly



Thuja plicata.

used conifers. While it can grow over 50' and needs room, there are several dwarf types including 'Can-Can,' Steeplechase® and 'Whipcord' that are available. 'Atrovirens' keeps its emerald green color all winter. 'Green Giant' is a popular hybrid that is narrow and tall and seems to hold up much better in a landscape inhabited by deer than American arborvitae. Western arborvitae is adaptable to sun or shade, prefers moist soils, and even tolerates occasional wind and heavy snow loads. Excellent choice as a specimen, tall hedge, screen, wind break, etc. Hardy to zone 4 with protection.



Comparisons from top: *T. plicata* on left and *T. occidentale* on right; *T. plicata* on left and deer damage to *Taxus* on right; *T. occidentale* on left and no damage to *T. plicata* on right

Honorable mention: Although not an evergreen, *Taxodium distichum*, Bald Cypress is an important native conifer that is quite deer resistant. Bald cypress displays finely textured, soft green foliage which turns golden yellow to bronze in the fall before falling. The strongly conical, upright tree can take just about anything: sun, shade, wet, dry, salt, wind, etc. Bald cypress is often found

in wet, swampy areas but is equally as effective near the seashore or even as a street tree in urban conditions where there is adequate room. Hardy to zone 4.



Taxodium distichum.

Herbaceous perennials

One doesn't really associate perennials as being evergreen but there are a few standouts that are and show reasonably good deer resistance.

***Epimedium* sp., Barrenwort:** Barrenwort is in the barberry family which are notable for being very adaptable as well as avoided by deer. This groundcover has many species and varieties available in the nursery trade. Barrenwort is not too picky and can grow in sun or shade and it thrives in rich, well-drained soil but tolerates drier conditions as well. The oval and sometimes linear, serrated leaves start off light green to bronze and eventually mature to dark green. Winter color can often be reddish maroon. Small clusters of petite flowers in the early spring can be yellow or pink



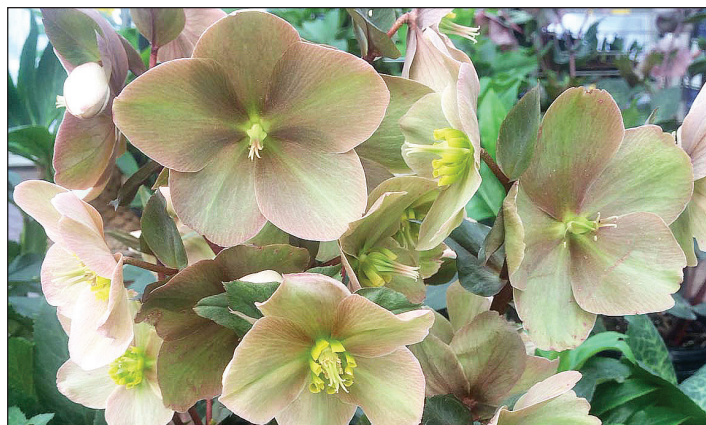
Epimedium 'Frohnleiten.'

depending on the variety. ‘Frohnleiten,’ ‘Ninja Stars’ and ‘Spine Tinger’ are among my favorites but there are many more. Hardy to zone 5.



Epimedium ‘Ninja Stars.’

Helleborus sp., Hellebore, Lenten Rose: Hellebores are the aristocrats of the perennial world as they offer interest most of the year. The diversity of flower types and colors in winter and early spring and often evergreen foliage make this plant a real standout at a time of year when you least expect it. Although I have heard of deer nibbling on the new foliage and flower buds, this plant is considered poisonous and rarely do I see it impacted greatly by mammals. There are too many hellebore varieties to mention but try the Winter Jewel® series as well as ‘Pink Frost.’ Hellebores prefer moist, well drained, organic soil and shade. Hardy to zone 4.

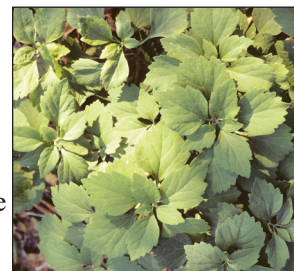


Hellebore flowers (top) and Hellebore ‘Pink Frost’ (above).

Other groundcovers

Vinca minor* (Common Periwinkle), *Pachysandra terminalis*,** and the native ***Pachysandra procumbens are all relatively deer resistant. *Vinca* is a ground hugging evergreen that will creep along the ground, eventually creating a wide carpet of foliage. The small, lavender blue flowers in spring are attractive against the lustrous foliage. In areas where there is not heavy deer pressure, periwinkle is usually spared from browsing. *Vinca* can tolerate heavy shade, varying types of soil, drought, and cold winters very well. Consider its invasive tendencies before planting. Hardy to zone 4.

Pachysandra is a well-known genus of groundcovers typically used in landscapes across the country. *P. terminalis*, Japanese Spurge, is quite an aggressive grower but is another groundcover that is typically left alone by deer. It too is very adaptable and can be used in dense shade or as erosion control along a hillside. The cultivar ‘Green Sheen’ is a striking variety that grows slower and offers dark green, highly glossy leaves. The native counterpart of Japanese Spurge, *P. procumbens* or Allegheny Spurge, is less aggressive and more of a gradual creeper in the garden and will never get to the size and spread of *P. terminalis*. Its soft green leaves are mottled with purple and white in winter. Both species are hardy to zone 5 but *Pachysandra procumbens* tends to only be evergreen in zone 7.



Pachysandra procumbens (top, in winter).