

## Checklist and Value of Deer Food Plants of the Rio Grande Plains

Steve Nelle, Biologist, NRCS

<b>Class I Browse Plants (The Best)</b>			
Guayacan	Hackberry *	Cedar elm	Chomonque
Coma *	Kidneywood	Bernardia	
<b>Class II Browse Plants (Good)</b>			
Granjeno *	Huisache *	Ephedra	False mesquite
Colima	Roemer acacia *	Armed saltbush	Littleleaf sumac
Fourwing saltbush	Wright acacia *	Prairie acacia	Clematis
Anaqua *			Calderon ratany
<b>Class III Browse Plants (Fair)</b>			
Guajillo *	Persimmon *	Desert yaupon	Cenizo
Blackbrush *	Hogplum	Tasajillo *	Ebony *
Catclaw acacia *	Feather dalea	Pricklypear *	Tenaza *
Twisted acacia *	Live oak *	Bush croton	Peachbrush
Brasil	Anacahuita *	Skeletonleaf goldeneye	Palo verde *
Lotebush	Spiny aster	Narrowleaf forestiera	Retama *
<b>Class IV Browse Plants (Poor)</b>			
Mesquite *	Whitebrush	Wolfberry	Allthorn goatbush
Dwarf screwbean	Coyotillo	Mountain laurel	Knifeleaf condalia
Creosotebush	Mariola	Allthorn	Shrubby blue sage
Algerita	Lantana	Yucca *	Saladilla

<b>Class I Perennial Forbs (The Best)</b>			
Dayflower	Texas nightshade	Bloodberry	Spiderwort
Primroses	Rain lilly	Heath aster	Nodviolet
Winecup	Gaura		
<b>Class II Perennial Forbs (Good)</b>			
Bushsunflower	Least snoutbean	Knotweed leafflower	Ruellia
Velvet bundleflower	Rock daisy	Texas bindweed	Morning glory
Wood sorrell	Sensitivebriar	Engelmann daisy	Twinevine
Western indigo	Trailing ratany	Squarebud daisy	Mistflower
Berlandier trumpet	Crow poison	Wild onion	Zornia
<b>Class III Perennial Forbs (Fair)</b>			
Orange zexmenia	Evolvulus	Globemallow	Prairie clover
Low menodora	Sida	Dalea	Verbena
Lazy daisy	Perennial spurge	Field ragweed	Westen ragweed
Copperleaf	Bladderpod	Windflower	Wild mercury
False nightshade	Texas salvia	Sticky selloa	Frogfruit
Indian mallow	Lindheimer tephrosia	Noseburn	False mallow
Neptunia	Milkpea	Turk's cap	Gayfeather
American snoutbean	Texas snoutbean		
<b>Class IV Perennial Forbs (Poor)</b>			
Goldaster	Dogweed	Broom snakeweed	Silverleaf nightshade
Goldenweed	Ericameria	Texas senna	Prairie coneflower
Rushpea	Bullnettle	Queen's delight	Frostweed
Ratear coldenia	False ragweed	Jicama	Leatherstem

Value Ratings are for the foliage. Some woody plants may have limited value for foliage but excellent value for fruit.

\* Indicates woody plants that have seasonal high value in the production of fruits, beans or flowers.

## PREFERENCE CATEGORIES OF DEER FOOD PLANTS

The checklist of plants on the reverse side contains the common woody plants and perennial forbs which deer use as food in the region. Deer also eat some grass but it usually makes up only 5 to 10% of the diet. When available, deer also eat annual forbs. Since annual forbs are short-lived and unreliable, they are not usually considered when evaluating the long-term stable deer food supply. Some of the more common annual forbs are listed at the bottom.

Woody plants and perennial forbs are the mainstay of the deer diet in the region. These plants are placed into one of four categories or classes according to their relative preference by deer. The Class I plants are the most preferred and Class IV are the least preferred. By evaluating the plants which are present and their abundance, managers can gain an understanding of the quality of their habitat compared to its potential.

**Class I** plants are highly preferred and will usually be eaten in preference to other plants. These are the “prime rib” of deer food. In fact Class I plants are so preferred by deer (as well as livestock) that they are often absent or in very short supply in most pastures. They have been grazed out of most pastures and persist primarily in protected areas. These are the best deer food plants, but because they are relatively uncommon, they do not contribute much to the deer diet.

**Class II** plants are desirable deer food plants. They can be compared to a platter of tender brisket. They are palatable, productive and high in nutrition. They should be rather common on well managed rangeland. If Class II plants are absent or very heavily used, it is an indication of too many deer, livestock or exotics.

**Class III** plants are not highly preferred by deer. They can be compared to hamburger meat. However, because they are so common, and because of a lack of better plants, they often make up the bulk of the deer diet. These plants are usually lower in nutrition and palatability than Class II plants. If Class III plants are heavily used, it is a sign of overpopulation and nutritional stress.

**Class IV** plants are the least preferred food plants for deer. One might compare them to vienna sausage. Deer will eat these plants, but only because better plants are not available.

There are exceptions to these generalizations. At certain times of the year such as early spring, even some Class IV plants are nutritious and readily eaten, but usually only for a short period. Also, if a pasture lacks Class I and Class II plants, then Class III become the most preferred by default.

The greater the diversity of plants, especially in Class I and Class II, the better the deer habitat will be. Rangeland dominated by few species, mostly in Class IV is generally considered poor habitat in need of improved management.

<b>ANNUAL FORBS OF SEASONAL IMPORTANCE</b>			
Wild vetch	Tallow weed	Annual croton	Tansymustard
Draba	Filaree	Pellitory	Bladderpod
Nuttall peavine	Lambsquarter	Bluecurls	Pepperweed
Burclover	Annual broomweed	Annual spurge	Lazy daisy
Tumbleweed	Pigweed	Kochia	Gaura
Annual tetraeneuris	Sleepydaisy	Wild carrot	Huisachedaisy
Prairie aster	Thistle	Indian blanket	Sunflower
Flax	Portulaca	Milkvetch	Carolina geranium

Note: Jimmy Rutledge, TPWD Biologist and Stan Reinke, NRCS Biologist assisted with assignment of preference categories.