

CHECKLIST AND VALUE OF DEER FOOD PLANTS OF THE TRANS PECOS

Steve Nelle, Biologist, NRCS, San Angelo

Class I Browse

Desert ceanothus	Littleleaf lead tree	Texas mulberry	Yellow bells	Granjeno
Fendler bush	Kidneywood	Hackberry	Toothed serviceberry	Guayacan
Red oak *	Big tooth maple	Heath cliffrose	Mountain mahogany	Anisicanthus

Class II Browse

Fourwing saltbush	Roemer acacia	Desert olive	Mormon tea ephedra	Gregg ash
Winterfat	False mesquite	Netleaf forestiera	Old man's beard	Apache plume
Butterflybush	Emory oak *	Desert myrtlecroton	Wright siltkassell	Bouvardia
Skeletonleaf goldeneye		Western soapberry	Range, White ratany	

Class III Browse

Mohr shin oak *	Skunkbush sumac	Persimmon *	Catclaw acacia	Lotebush
Graves oak *	Littleleaf sumac	Sticky seloa	Whitethorn acacia	Green condalia
Gray oak *	Evergreen sumac	Little walnut	Blackbrush acacia	Feather dalea
Sand shinnery *	Mexican buckeye	Desert willow	Guajillo	Black dalea

Class IV Browse

Juniper *	Mariola	Cenizo	Algerita	Allthorn
Mesquite *	Gray coldenia	B B silverleaf	Fragrant mimosa	Whitebrush
Creosote bush	Candelilla	Mountain laurel	Catclaw mimosa	Oreganillo
Tar bush	Longleaf ephedra	Broom snakeweed	Brickle bush	Sand sage
Pinyon pine	Lechuguilla *	Sotol	Yucca *	False agave
Javelinabush	Sacahuiste	Pricklypear *	Cholla *	Wolfberry
Ocotillo	Bush croton	Tornillo	Damianita	

Class I Perennial Forbs

Showy menodora	Western primrose	Wild bean	Dayflower	Rain lilly
Rough menodora	Penstemon	Prairie acacia	Heath aster	Gaura
Warnock justicia	Heath carlowrightia	Bushsunflower		

Class II Perennial Forbs

Bundleflower	Texas snoutbean	Parry ruellia	Hary tubetongue	Snakeherb
Sida	Evolvulus	Rock daisy	Milkwort	Trailing ratany
Janusia	Chickthief mentzelia	Buckwheat	Orange zexmenia	Wild onion
Desert hibiscus	Mexican sagewort	Copperleaf	Knotweed leafflower	Spiderling
Paleface hibiscus	Passion vine	Dutchmans pipe	Low carlowrightia	Skeletonplant

Class III Perennial Forbs

Low wild mercury	Ground cherry	Grassland croton	Dalea	False nightshade
Verbena	Bladderpod	Globemallow	Indian mallow	Bluets
Dutchmans britches	Noseburn	False ragweed	Field ragweed	Dwarf aster
Perennial sparges	Spiny happlopappus	Scarlet muskflower	Whitlow wort	Angel trumpet

Class IV Perennial Forbs

Ratear coldenia	Goldaster	Dogweed	Milkweed	Paperflower
Leatherweed croton	Threadleaf groundsel	Desert holly	Silverleaf nightshade	Spikemoss
Plains zinnia	Goldenweed	Leatherstem	Stinging cevallia	Twinleaf senna

- These woody plants have high seasonal value in the production of flowers, stalks, beans, fruits or acorns

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 goats and sheep) that they are usually 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 rather 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, goats, sheep 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. For example, if there is a browse line on Graves oak (Class III) making it unavailable, deer may consume large amounts of juniper (cedar).

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.

ANNUAL FORBS OF SEASONAL IMPORTANCE

Wild vetch	Tallow weed	Annual croton	Tansymustard	Draba
Nuttall peavine	Filaree	Bladderpod	Pellitory	Bluecurls
Burclover	Lambsquarter	Annual broomweed	Annual spurge	Caltrop
Tumbleweed	Pigweed	Kochia	Annual saltbush	Bidens
Pepperweed	Mt mustard	Annual copperleaf	Annual primroses	Cowpen daisy