

Common Browse Plants Used by White-Tailed Deer in the Cross Timbers and Prairies of Texas

White-tailed deer eat the leaves, stems, and fruits of a wide variety of plants. They choose vegetation based on palatability, seasonal availability, abundance, precipitation, and overall health of the habitat. Deer prefer forbs; however, forb abundance is highly dependent on precipitation. We often gauge the value of a habitat to white-tailed deer based on the volume and variety of browse plants. Browse plants make up the most stable part of the habitat because they are deep rooted and less dependent on seasonal rainfall. This brochure is intended to help landowners identify common browse plants and their relative importance to deer in the Cross Timbers and Prairies of Texas. Diet studies, field experience, stem counts, and cursory observations of plants under natural habitat conditions were used to place plants into preference classes.



Western Soapberry
Sapindus saponaria var. drummondii
Small tree to 15m; narrow, alternate leaves turning bright yellow in the fall; gray to red bark with small, reddish scales possible; when ripe, fruits are grape-sized translucent globes; often found along fence rows and wooded edges



Texas Ash
Fraxinus texensis
Small tree; leaves oval or spade shaped, pale below with prominent veins; bark rough and gray color; fruit wing shaped, in clusters; common on limestone slopes and bluffs



THIRD CHOICE — Plants lightly consumed and/or when first and second choice plants are absent

Agarito
Berberis trifoliata
Evergreen shrub; leaves blue-gray above, holly-like with sharp points, occurring in three leaflets; stems gray-brown, yellow within; bright red berries in June; dry, rocky limestone soils.



Ashe Juniper/Mountain or Blueberry Cedar
Juniperus ashei
Evergreen shrub or small tree; reddish-brown bark shreds into vertical strips as trees age; leaves tiny, scale-like and sharp-pointed; dark blue, cone-like berries produced by female plants; limestone hills and slopes.



Common Persimmon
Diospyros virginiana
Medium-sized tree to 20m; oblong leaves with pointed tips, dark green above, pale below; dark brown bark with deep fissures; round yellowish-orange fruits, ripen after leaf drop in the fall; variety of soils, old fields and clearings.



Lotebush
Ziziphus obtusifolia
Shrub; small, oblong, grayish-green leaves with three distinct veins; smooth, gray bark, branch tips ending in thorns; small, black, globular fruits in summer; rocky or sandy soils.



Mesquite
Prosopis glandulosa var. glandulosa
Small, thorny tree; compound leaves with narrow leaflets; rough, reddish-brown bark; seed pods 4-10 inches long, valuable in deer diets during droughty periods; common invader of Texas rangelands.



Mexican Buckeye
Ungnadia speciosa
Small tree; distinctive three-chambered seed pods with dark brown, marble-sized seed within each chamber; mottled gray bark; alternate, compound leaves; bright pink flower clusters in the spring; found on canyon slopes and along creeks.



Prickly Pear
Opuntia lindheimeri
Clump-forming cactus; jointed, waxy, flat stems or "pads" with spines; yellow flowers; fruit or "tuna" red to purple, ripening in late summer, common mast component of deer diets in late summer and early fall.

FIRST CHOICE — Plants that are highly preferred by white-tailed deer.



Blackhaw viburnum/Rusty Blackhaw
Viburnum rufidulum
Small tree; opposite leaves with finely toothed edges, turning red in the fall; bark spongy to touch with alligator skin appearance; waxy fruits in clusters, dark blue, football shape, fruit retained in fall



Blackjack Oak
Quercus marilandica
Small tree; leaves triangular to wedge-shaped with pointed tips; bark rough and dark; limbs often reach the ground; found on rocky and sandy soils; valued as browse, with acorns a very important component of fall and winter diets



Bois d'arc/Osage Orange
Maclura pomifera
Medium tree; leaves with smooth edges and pointed tips, thorny stems with milky sap; roots conspicuously orange in color; large round baseball-size fruit, yellow in color with a wrinkled surface



Cedar Elm
Ulmus crassifolia
Tree; rough-textured leaves with serrated edges; young branches and seedlings often winged; bark with deep furrows; winged seeds mature in fall; uplands or lowlands



Hackberry
Celtis laevigata
Tree; rough, lance-shaped leaves with prominent veins; gray bark with warty bumps; small, round, reddish fruits; common in bottomland, woodlands, and fence rows



Mexican Plum
Prunus mexicana
Small tree; leaves egg shaped with serrated edges and wrinkled appearance; bark deeply furrowed; conspicuous in early spring by presence of white flowers; round, purple fruit



Photos courtesy TPWD staff.

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Possumhaw/Deciduous Yaupon
Ilex decidua

Shrub or small tree; alternate, oblong leaves with rounded teeth on leaf edges; small, round, reddish-orange berries persisting after leaf drop; found in thickets and along woodland edges.



Post Oak
Quercus stellata

Moderate to large tree; leaves deeply lobed with no points, shiny above and pale below; bark thick with dark gray ridges; acorns produced annually; upland prairies and woodlands; valued as browse, with acorns very important to fall and winter diets



Rough-leaf Dogwood
Cornus drummondii

Shrub or small tree; thin leaves with prominent veins, rough to touch and dark green above, fuzzy to touch and pale below; reddish stems; small, waxy, white berries



Coralberry
Symphoricarpos orbiculatus

Small, thicket-forming shrub with gray bark; opposite, oval leaves; coral red to pink berries often persistent through the winter.



Elbowbush
Forestiera pubescens

Shrub; leaves oval shape, dull green and lightly serrated on edge; bark light gray, smooth; blue-black rounded fruits, in clusters; one of the first to "leaf out" in spring; uplands



Flame Leaf Sumac
Rhus lanceolata

Large shrub or small tree; stems winged; leaves long and narrow, smooth above, hairy below, turning red in fall; bark smooth; fruit in large clusters, dark red, hairy; increases after fire or disturbance



Sawtooth Greenbrier
Smilax bona-nox

Spiny vine; leaves triangular to heart-like with variations; stems green; berries spherical, black-blue color; often green throughout winter; common in fence rows, understory, and uplands



Texas Oak/Spanish Oak
Quercus buckleyi

Small to medium tree; leaves with deep lobes, tips sharply pointed; smooth, gray bark; producing acorns every other year; occurs on limestone outcrops and stream bottoms



Texas Sophora/Eve's Necklace
Sophora affinis

Shrub or small tree; oval, fuzzy leaves with smooth edges, shiny blue/black; fruits resemble a beaded necklace; found on rocky limestone slopes and ravines, usually found sheltered within other species due to herbivory



Lime Prickly Ash/Hercules Club
Zanthoxylum hirsutum

Shrub or small tree; reddish thorns and leaf stems; leaves opposite, leathery, aromatic, shiny above with elliptic to oblong oval shape; light gray bark smooth with thorns; sandy or rocky soil



Live Oak

Quercus virginiana
Large, evergreen tree; leaves usually elliptic or oblong, margins smooth with some variation, dark green and shiny above, pale below; bark dark brown to black; acorns produced annually and valuable in deer diets



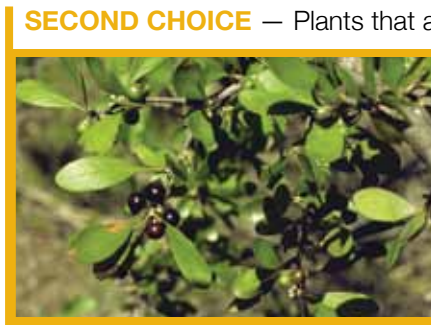
Pecan
Carya illinoensis

Large tree to 40m height; alternate leaves with scythe-shaped leaflets; gray-brown scaly or flaky bark; thin-shelled, oblong-shaped nuts, maturing in fall months; state tree of Texas; along creek and river bottoms.



White Shin Oak
Quercus sinuata

Shrub or small tree; leaves with smooth, wavy edges; gray, shaggy bark; producing acorns every year; commonly found on shallow, limestone soils



Bumelia/Chittam
Bumelia lanuginosa

Small tree; leaves oval to elliptic shape, shiny above and fuzzy below; bark resembles oak, stems with thorns; round, dark blue fruit; woods, riparian zones, hillsides, rocky outcrops



Carolina Buckthorn
Frangula caroliniana

Shrub or small tree; leaves large and elliptic to oblong, finely toothed, bright green above; bark smooth, gray to brown; fruit a small, rounded drupe, red turning to black color



Redbud
Cercis canadensis var. texensis

Small, thornless tree; leaves heart shaped to oval, smooth edges, shiny green; bark reddish brown to gray, smooth; fruit enclosed in a reddish bean-like pod; limestone soils and bottomlands



Sand Plum
Prunus angustifolia

Small thicket forming shrub; leaves narrow with serrated edges, reddish brown stems form a zig-zag shape, sometimes spiny; red or yellow cherry-like fruits; common on sandy soils



Skunkbush Sumac/Aromatic Sumac
Rhus trilobata

Shrub; leaves with three lobes, tips pointed, veins prominent below; aromatic smell when bruised; bark gray to brown in color; reddish-orange fruits densely haired, in clusters

SECOND CHOICE — Plants that are commonly eaten by white-tailed deer.