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.

**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

- **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 late fall; uplands or lowlands

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

- **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

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

- **Cedar Roe**
  - *Ziziphus obtusifolia*
  - Shrub; small, oblong, grayish-green leaves; rough, reddish-brown bark with deep fissures; round yellowish-orange fruits, ripen after leaf drop in the fall; variety of soils, old fields and clearings

- **Chokecherry**
  - *Prunus mexicana*
  - Tree; deciduous leaves with serrated 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

- **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

- **Cedar Sapling**
  - *Juniperus ashei*
  - Ashe Juniper/Mountain or Blueberry Cedar
  - Evergreen shrub or small tree; reddish-brown bark; seed pods 4-10 inches long, valuable to deer in diets during droughty periods; bark; seed pods translucent globes; often found along fence rows and wooded edges

- **Opuntia lindheimeri**
  - Prickly Pear
  - Cacti with spine grafted to the skin; dry, rocky limestone soils; often found along fence rows and wooded edges

- **Hawthorn**
  - *Crataegus phaenopyrum*
  - Small tree; leaves oval or spade shaped, pale below with prominent veins; bark rough and gray color; fruit wing shaped, common on limestone slopes and bluffs

- **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

- **Common Soapberry**
  - *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 slopes, old fields and clearings

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- **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

- **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 late fall; uplands or lowlands

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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 ovate 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

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

Redbud
Cercis canadensis var. texensis
Small, thornless tree; leaves heart shaped to ovate, smooth edges, bright green above; bark smooth, gray to brown; fruit a small, rounded drupe, red turning to black color

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

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

Pecan
Carya illinoinensis
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.

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

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