



Gardening with Shrubs

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1. Agenda: Definitions & Tibits, What Shrubs Can Do, Native & Natural, The Matrix Layer – groundcovers, The Structure Layer, The Vignettes Layer, Pruning & Feeding, Resources
2. Inspiration: Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, Olbrich Gardens- Madison, Private Gardens, Missouri Botanical Gardens, Spooner Research Station, Teaching & Display Garden
3. Definitions & Tibits, Types: Deciduous, Evergreen, Flowering; Shrubs include any woody plant that does not die down to ground level in winter; A shrub usually has more than one stem originating at or close to ground level; Roses were the first shrubs grown and purchased a century ago; Shrubs & trees are at a disadvantage to perennials in the nursery trade because they take longer to develop and introduce new varieties; The range of offerings had been restricted until the introduction of container-grown hardy plants (before that only bare-root)
4. Benefits: Shrubs are found worldwide and play a crucial role in soil stabilization, supporting insects, storing carbon, among other benefits; Add permanence, structure, and presence throughout four seasons; Can be pruned to control size & shape; Once established low maintenance
5. Why choose a shrub vs. perennial? Can be used in a variety of ways: backdrop, ground cover, hedge, focal point; Shrubs help support perennials that may flop if not staked; Can serve as a framework for restrained vines, stick to vines that can be cut to the ground for easy clean-up; Provide year-round presence, permanence
6. Native and Natural: Goal – build gardens from native plant foundations and with ample floral diversity, even if some of that diversity isn't native. Rely on native trees and shrubs, they make positive, long-term contributions to the ecology of place. Some cultivars outperform natives; Features in your garden that add richness of life are often overlooked such as a dead stump or small basin for water; Plant for attractive flowers, handsome fall colors, abundant fruits for birds
7. Herbivory: Plants that are eaten by pollinators, wildlife; If nothing is eating your plants, what life is your garden really supporting? Research shows that less than 20% is eaten in the growing season

Native Flowering Shrubs

8. Flowering Basics: Most flowering shrubs need at least 4 hours of sun – without it most new wood will fail to ripen enough to produce flower buds the next season; Shrubs that flower on wood produced the same season will do well in semi-shade (example: Hydrangea, Potentilla); Think of shrubs in groups – ex. Lilacs bloom for about 2 weeks, combine with a Shrub Rose, Elderberry, Dogwood, or small tree such a crabapple to extend season
9. Downy Serviceberry, *Amelanchier arborea*: Grows 15-25 feet tall, White blooms late spring/early summer, Sun: Full sun to part shade, Can be grown in most soils with medium moisture conditions
10. American Bladderwort, *Staphylea trifolia*: Fast-growing, suckering; Moist soils; Dense colonies; 10-15 feet; Blue Blooms late spring/early summer; Part Shade to Shade
11. Kalm St. John's Wort, *Hypericum kalmianum*: Grows 2-3 feet tall; small, dense, evergreen shrub or subshrub; Pink/purple blooms late summer/early fall; Sun: Full sun to part shade; Grows in Loam to Sandy soil in Medium to moist conditions
12. New Jersey Tea (*Ceanothus americanus*): Grows 2-3 feet tall; White blooms late spring/early summer; Sun: Full to sun; Grows in Loam to Sandy soil in dry-medium conditions
13. Northern Bush Honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*): Grows 1-3 feet tall; Orange, yellow or gold blooms in summer; Sun: Full to part sun; Grows in Loam to Sandy soil in dry-medium conditions
14. Native Roses: *Carolina Rose (*Rosa Carolina*)-1-3 feet, full sun; *Meadow Rose (*Rosa Blanda*)-3-5 feet, full to part sun, almost thornless; *Virginia Rose (*Rosa virginiana*)- 5-8 feet, full sun, is easy to transplant, and prefers well-drained acidic soils but is adaptable. It is also salt tolerant.
15. Native Conifers
Juniper: Prefers neutral to slightly acidic well-drained soil in full sun; tolerates drought and wind
Balsam fir: Best in cool, damp places in partial shade to sun, keep away from hot, drying winds
Spruce: Best in well-drained, slightly acidic soils in full sun, keep away from winter winds & road salt
Pine: Best in fertile, acidic, well-drained soils in full sun. Does not need protection from winds but keep away from road salt
White cedar-*arborvitae*: Moisture retentive soil in full sun or part shade, keep away from dry, windswept locations
16. Conifers – Miniature vs. Dwarf: Miniature: grow less than 1 inch per year; Dwarf: grow 1-6 inches per year; Can be grown in pots, need winter protection, the dwarfs last longest in pots
17. Native Landscape Shrubs: *Amelanchier* species (serviceberries), *Ilex verticillata* (winterberry), *Physocarpus opulifolius* cultivars (ninebark), *Potentilla fruticosa* cultivars (shrubby cinquefoil), *Prunus nigra* 'Princess Kay' (Canada plum), *Viburnum* species (viburnums)

18. The Matrix Layer (Groundcovers) Green mulch, Consider first, plant last, Up to 75% in the wild, try for 50% in a home garden
19. *Cotoneaster adpressus* 'Tom Thumb' or 'Little Gem', Full sun to part shade, Best grown in moist, loamy, well-drained soils, Good drainage is important, this is a tough and adaptable plant that can withstand poor soils
20. *Potentilla fruticosa*: Full sun to part shade; Blooms May through September; Easily grown in average, medium moisture, well-drained soils; Prefers evenly moist soils; Best flowering occurs in full sun, but plants tolerate part shade; Prune as needed
21. *Spiraea japonica*: Full sun, tolerates light shade; Non-native, Blooms May to August; Easily grown in average, medium moisture, well-drained soils, tolerates a wide range of soils. Prefers rich, moist loams; Remove faded flower clusters as practicable (light shearing is an option) to encourage additional bloom; Flowers on new wood, so prune in late winter to early spring if needed.
22. *Pinus sylvestris* 'Hillside Creeper'; Common name: Scotch Pine; Grows in full sun, likes acidic soil; 'Hillside Creeper' grows 12"+ per year, prostrate, spreading cultivar. Over the first 8-10 years, it typically grows 2' tall but spreads to 8' wide. Growth rate slows considerably as plant ages.
23. *Juniperus horizontalis*: Woody-creeping juniper; Full sun, prefers dry sandy soil, intolerant of wet soils; Spread 6-18" tall, 3-8 feet side; Native to North American; Foliage is typically green to blue-green during the growing season, but often acquires purple tones in winter
24. *Microbiota decussata* 'Celtic Pride': Common name: Siberian Cypress; Fern-like foliage, disease resistant; Full to part sun; Easily grown in average, moist but well-drained soils; Best performance is in cool summer climates
25. Rain Garden Shrubs: Arrowwood - *Viburnum dentatum*, Elderberry - *Sambucus canadensis* or *Sambucus racemosa*, Meadowsweet - *Spiraea alba*, Ninebark - *Physocarpus opulifolius*, Rosebay Rhododendron - *Rhododendron maximum*, Silky Dogwood - *Cornus amomum* (and other dogwoods as well), Spicebush - *Lindera benzoin*, Hydrangea - *Hydrangea arborescens*
26. The Structure Layer: Gives the garden its form; Trees, shrubs, coarse herbaceous plants; Target 5-10% of total planting; Most return on investment with 3-4 seasons of interest and longevity; Look beyond showy flowers and consider what else a plant offers for the most horticultural mileage
27. Shrubs-Sun to Part Shade: Arborvitae, Chokeberry, Dogwood, Forsythia*, Hydrangea, Juniper*, Lilac*, Pine*, Ninebark, *Picea abies* (Spruce)*, *Potentilla**, Rhododendron, Siberian Cypress*, *Spiraea**, *Viburnum*, *Weigela**, Witch Hazel* (*Plants not favored by Deer)
28. Shrubs: Part to full shade: Summersweet, Dogwoods, *Diervillia** (honeysuckle), smooth hydrangea, Rhododendron, Arrowwood *viburnum*, Russian cypress*, Yew (*Plants not favored by Deer)

29. A Few Tips: Brightly colored, variegated foliage, neat & manicured – may not fit in; Good transitional shrubs: Viburnum, Elderberry, Dogwood – they have light, informal habit that doesn't look out of place; Try big, bold shrubs grouped with trees; Go for borders larger than 6 feet (not many shrubs have an ultimate height/spread <3 ft.); Avoid straight lines
30. Shrub Growth Patterns: Most shrubs/trees continue to grow, even dwarf- just at a slower pace; Shrubs can be short-lived – even more so in cold, wet areas (ex. Barberry life 5-15 years vs. Serviceberry life of 20-50 years); Hardiness of plants is not an exact science
31. Summersweet: Clethra alnifolia- Upright, multi-stemmed, spreads slowly by suckers (can dig and replant), will get large by spreading; Blooms on new wood, clusters of white to pink flowers over a 3 weeks in summer, fragrant, late to leaf out in spring; 3-4' tall and wide, prefers partial shade, tolerates sun if consistently moist, tolerates salt, prefers fertile acidic soils, it will die out if the soil gets too dry, deer-resistant, native; Do not over-prune, remove old growth over no fewer than 3 years
32. Red Twig Dogwood: Cornus sericea - Native, spread 5-9' spreads to 10'; Full sun to part shade; Moist to wet soil, not drought tolerant; Dull white flowers in late May, white fruit in June; Fall color, red stems year-round; Attracts butterflies, bees, birds; Deer resistant
33. American Cranberry Bush Viburnum - Viburnum opulus var. Americanum; 8-12' tall and wide; Full sun to part shade, moist, well-drained soil; White flowers in late spring (cut flowers), bright red fruit; Good for pollinators, mammals, songbirds
34. Elderberry: Sambucus - Native: S. canadensis, S. racemose; 5-12' tall and wider, aggressive, spreading by rhizomes; Full sun to part shade; Moist to wet soil, tolerates dry; White, fragrant, edible flowers in summer; Attractive fruit; Birds, bees, butterflies, pollinators, hummingbirds, small mammals
35. Sumac: Rhus - Can be low-spreading shrubs, upright irregularly shaped shrubs, or trained as small trees; All spread vigorously by suckers, branch freely; Most produce either male or female flowers; Prefer full sun, tolerates part shade, do well in lean soils; Tiger Eyes® - Rhus Typhina
36. Lilac: Syringa - Full sun, wide range of soils, prefer consistent moisture; Can limit growth by pruning, but makes more sense to plant with plenty of room; Removing spent blooms may increase bloom in next season-remove immediately after bloom since next year's buds set about a month after they bloom
37. Juniper – Juniperus - Year-round interest, versatile in gardens, useful life expectancy is 15-30 years, wide variety; Prefer full sun, avoid road salt, avoid wet conditions, space for the mature plant; Upright forms have roots that dig deep into the soil, spreading types are more shallow, they do not send off suckers; Fertilize in spring with an acidic fertilizer (Miracid); Trim to shape annually, do not allow plant to grow without pruning for several years, prune new growth in early summer

38. Arborvitae: Thuja - Very versatile in garden, life expectancy is 15-40 years, common name: white cedar, all-seasons interest; Full sun to part shade; Important shrub/tree for wildlife shelter & food (need protection from deer & rabbits); Full sun to part shade, branches may break in heavy snow, need good drainage, consistent moisture; Prune just after new growth if needed to shape
39. Rhododendron (Azalea) - Full sun to partial shade, rich-acidic soil, well-drained; 4' wide x tall, slow growing – can cut back to manage size and shape; Blooms early to mid-spring; Glossy leaves emerge as the blooms fade, fall foliage change are more pronounced in a sunny site; Usually, zone 4 or 5 but can be grown in sheltered spot in zone 3
40. Hydrangea - In Zone 3 – H. arborecens (smooth), H. paniculate (panicle), great cut/dry flowers; Vary in light needs, some better in full sun, some in part shade, adapt well to a wide range of soil, avoid dry sites; Coloration is directly related to availability of aluminum (& soil pH) for Big Leaf Hydrangea – not hardy here; Space with mature size in mind, dwarf varieties are available; Fertilize once in June with 10-10-10; Deadheading is personal choice, both smooth & panicle bloom on new wood
41. Hydrangea paniculata 'Limelight'
42. The Vignettes Layer: Pretty pictures within a planting; Carry a garden throughout the season from one flowering event to another; Example: Bridalwreath Spirea to Hydrangea; Quickest way to craft visual interest is to increase the contrast
43. Pruning (if needed): Remember – you do not need to prune! Those that flower early – cut back immediately after flowering (ex. Lilacs); Summer flowering – prune in early spring (ex. Hydrangea); Control shape & size, pests & disease, remove suckers, remove reversion of variegated shrubs; Stimulate vigorous growth & foliage, rejuvenate, encourage flowering (but reduces fruit production)
44. Pruning & Thinning: UW-Madison Division of Extension Publications
[Pruning Deciduous Shrubs,](https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/pruning-deciduous-shrubs/)
<https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/pruning-deciduous-shrubs/>
[Pruning Evergreens,](https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/pruning-evergreens/)
<https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/pruning-evergreens/>
45. Feeding: Most shrubs grow adequately without feeding; Regular feeding can keep them healthy when stressed or in poor soil; Soil-release fertilizer is best once shrub first begins to grow in spring along drip line; Tender new growth at the wrong time can cause damage – don't fertilize after mid-summer; Once established mature shrubs should not need watering
46. Shrub-like Herbaceous Plant Substitutes: Peony, Paeonia; Spikenard, Aralia cordata 'Sun King'; Goatsbeard, Aruncus dioicus; Amsonia, 'Blue Star'; False Indigo, Baptisia; Daylily, Hemerocallis; Catmint, Nepeta; Russian Sage, Perovskia atriplicifolia; Rhubarb, Rheum

Web Links

- For more resources and information on North Country Master Gardener Volunteers
www.northcountrymgv.org
- Spooner Agriculture Research Station Teaching and Display Garden
<http://spooner.ars.wisc.edu/demonstration-garden/>
- "Selecting Plants for Pollinators"
<http://www.pollinator.org/PDFs/Laurentian.rx9.pdf>

Resources

- *The Creative Shrub Garden*, Andy McIndoe Timber Press ©2014
- *New Naturalism, Designing and Planting a Resilient, Ecologically Vibrant Home Garden*, by Kelly Morris, Quarto Publishing-Cold Springs Press ©2021
- "Plants Not Favored by Deer", UW Extension Bulletin # A3727-
<https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0145/8808/4272/files/A3727.pdf>
- The Learning Store – UW Division of Extension
<https://learningstore.extension.wisc.edu/collections/lawn-garden>

Thank you

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