

Grow American! – Ten Great Native Shrubs for Ct Yards *by Peggy Van Acker*

If you think native plants must look weedy and dull, reconsider! New England is home to many beautiful shrubs that can bring year-round beauty and structure to your garden. Many are deer resistant, although nothing can be guaranteed totally deer proof. Specially selected cultivars of most shrubs are now available and enable you to select for compact growth habits or different flower colors. Best of all, planting native shrubs creates an inviting environment for our local birds and butterflies. Your plants will look natural, be less difficult to grow, and attract more birds and butterflies to your yard! Following are descriptions of ten of the best to consider planting; starting with the source of my favorite fragrance of summer.

1 Summersweet – *Clethra alnifolia* – Summersweet puts forth long-lasting spikes of fragrant white flowers in July and August, has a dense rounded habit, and turns a golden yellow in the fall! Give it moist, reasonably well-drained soil in full sun to heavy shade. It is an adaptable, deer resistant plant and a fine choice for the shrub border. The species will spread slowly, and can create attractive masses along the edge of woodlands. Summersweet grows 3 to 6 feet high, depending on the cultivar.

Cultivars:

Hummingbird and Compacta – only grow 3' to 3 ½' high. Hummingbird will form colonies; Compacta is more of a single shrub.

Pink Spires and Rosea offer pink flowers, and grow 3' to 6' high

Ruby Spice has deep rose flowers and grows to a maximum of 6'

'Sixteen Candles' – Compact with long-lasting, upright white flowers. 3' to 5' tall



Summersweet 'Hummingbird'

2 Sweetspire – *Itea virginica* – Sweetspire has deliciously fragrant, profuse white flower spikes in early summer and some of the best crimson to purple fall foliage color in the entire plant kingdom. It takes heavy shade or full sun, in wet or dry soils and grows 3' to 5' high and wide. Itea is one of the best summer-flowering shrubs for shaded conditions and is fairly deer resistant, too! Itea cultivars are especially good choices.

Cultivars:

'Little Henry' has a compact mounded habit, staying around 3' tall.

'Henry's Garnet' has long stalks of flowers, a consistent brilliant fall color and grows 4' to 5' high and up to 6' wide.



Itea 'Little Henry'

3 Arrowwood Viburnum – *Viburnum dentatum* – This becomes a large, rounded, deer resistant shrub with spreading arched branches. It's white flowers of May and June are borne in attractive flat clusters, that are followed by blue-black fruits in September and October. The fruits are a great favorite of birds! Arrowwood Viburnum grows 6' to 8' high and wide and can be planted on the edge of the yard or woods or in masses in large lawn areas if desired. Compact cultivars are available.

Cultivars:

'Blue Muffin' – More compact, growing to 4' to 7', and blooms heavily producing a large amount of deep blue fruit. (aka 'Christom')

'Chicago Luster' – Glossy green foliage, blooms later, grows 8" to 10'



***Viburnum dentatum* 'Blue Muffin'**

4 Mountain Laurel – *Kalmia latifolia* – A handsome broadleaved evergreen shrub that produces lovely clusters of elegantly formed blooms in May and June. It requires good drainage (no soggy soils!) and prefers morning sun and some afternoon shade in the winter. Once established this is a vigorous, easily pruned spring bloomer. Mountain Laurel grows to 4' to 12' high, and may occasionally be damaged by deer. Cultivars are available in a wide variety of heights and flower colors from whites to pinks to reds. Given average acidic soil and afternoon shade, Mountain Laurel is a terrific evergreen for the home garden. There are scores of cultivars available. It also happens to be the Ct state flower.

Cultivars:

'Elf' - Dwarf form w/ pink buds that open white – 2' to 3' H and W

'Minuet' – Dwarf, flowers white with red throat -3' H and W

'Carol' – Red bud open to bright white – 6' – 10' H and W

'Little Linda' – pink buds open to white – 3'-4' H and W

'Olympic Fire' – Red-pink buds open to pale pink – 5' H and W

'Sarah' – Red buds open to pink, more tolerant of sun, 4'-6' H and W

'Snowdrift' – White buds and flowers with red marks – 5'-6' H and W



Mountain laurel 'Olympic Fire'

5 Inkberry – *Ilex glabra* - Inkberry is your basic evergreen shrub. The species can be a leggy, billowy shrub of 8' high by 8' wide, but several excellent compact cultivars are now available. Inkberry cultivars can be used for evergreen foundation plantings, in masses for screening or for accent plantings. Inkberry is tolerant of wet or dry soils, grows in full sun or moderate shade, and is generally trouble free, although it is, on rare occasions, damaged by deer. Its small dark fruits are popular with birds.

Cultivars:

'Gem Box' – An excellent alternative to boxwood, this variety has small dark green leaves that are reddish when they first emerge, and it has good branching to the ground. Maintains a dense full appearance! Grows only 2' to 3' high and wide

'Nigra' – Similar to Gem Box

'Compacta' – a rounded form, dense, but tends to drop its lower foliage and may become leggy. Grows 4' to 7' high

'Shamrock' – a shorter, slow-growing rounded plant, grows 4' to 6' high and wide. May slowly become leggy, but can be cut back.



Inkberry 'Shamrock'

6 Oakleaf Hydrangea – *Hydrangea quercifolia* – This large, dramatic hydrangea is one of the most handsome landscape plants available, but is often underutilized on our properties. Its full mounded form, large lobed leaves, and magnificent white flowers add terrific style to a suburban yard, and it is rarely touched by deer. In addition, its leaves turn a rich burgundy color in the fall and hold well into November. Its flowers open in June and last for three to four weeks, often turning a pinkish color with age. Provide moist, well drained organic soils – mix in peatmoss when planting - and then mulch it. Use Oakleaf Hydrangeas alone or in groupings, as an accent in the lawn or massed at a woodland edge. Compact cultivars are also effective in border plantings.

Cultivars:

‘Alice’ – The largest, most vigorous selection. Flower clusters can exceed 12” long. Grows 5’ to 10’ in H and W

‘Snow Queen’ – Superior branching, dense 6” upright flowers that age to rosy-red

‘Munchkin’ – A dense, smaller variety with large, upright flowers that fade to pink. Grows 3’ H and 3’-5’ W

‘Pee Wee’ – Dwarf plant has white flowers that fade to pink, 3’-4’ H+W

‘Ruby Slippers’ – Compact with large flowers that turn rose-pink, 4’ H and W

‘Sikes Dwarf’ – Dwarf, with smaller leaves and flowers. Fades to blush pink. 2’H and 3-4’ W



Oakleaf Hydrangea ‘Ruby Slippers’

7 Winterberry – *Ilex verticillate* – This informal, tall shrub is grown for its dramatic, profuse, red berries that are effective from September into December! They are eventually feasted upon by birds when all other fruits are gone. Winterberry prefers moist, acid soils and at least a half day of sun. A great bush for the back of the border or along a stream or woodland edge. Once established Winterberry tolerates deer browsing. Compact varieties are available, and you may need to plant a small male variety to ensure pollination of the female, berry producing varieties.

Female Cultivars:

‘Winter Red’ – A tremendous fruit producer, a rounded shrub growing to 7’ – 8’ tall and wide.

‘Red Sprite’ - A compact variety with large berries, grows 3’ H and W

Male cultivars (no berries)

‘Southern Gentleman’ – Male pollinator for Winter Red 6’ - 9’ H and W

‘Jim Dandy’ - A male pollinator for Red Sprite, grows 3’ H and W



Winterberry ‘Red Sprite’

8 Highbush Blueberry – *Vaccinium corymbosum* – This handsome, multi-stemmed, deer resistant shrub is a fine choice for the sunny border or the back of the vegetable garden. Its white flowers are an excellent source of pollen for our native pollinators in the spring, and the foliage turns a beautiful deep red in autumn! Dozens of bird species are known to feed on the berries, and humans relish them too. Blueberries will attract Catbirds, Robins, Eastern Bluebirds, Cedar Waxwings, and Orchard Orioles, among others. Many songbirds will nest within the foliage as well. Highbush Blueberry will grow in partial shade but does best in full sun, on wet to moist, acidic soils. This is an easy to grow, attractive shrub for any yard.

Cultivars:

'Top Hat' – A cross between Highbush and Lowbush, a dense plant, with a fiery fall color and delicious berries. Grows 2' H and 2' W

Other Cultivars are available and it is recommended you plant more than one cultivar to ensure good pollination.



Blueberry 'Top Hat'

9 Virginia Rose – *Rosa virginiana* – This is an upright, hardy, salt tolerant rose with attractive dark-green leaves and 2” - 3” in diameter pink flowers. Its flowers are followed by bright red rose hips which will persist for several months. It has an excellent fiery fall color, and does not suffer from black spot fungal problems! Virginia rose is tolerant of a wide range of soil types, prefers sun or light shade, and grows to 4’ high and 6’ wide, as it spreads slowly. Beneficial insects value this shrub for nectar and nesting material, and it is somewhat deer resistant.

Cultivars:

None Available



Rosa virginiana

10 Tartarian Dogwood, or Redosier– *Cornus alba* or *C. sericea* – Grown for its vibrant red or yellow winter stem color, this shrub dogwood grows 5’ to 6’ wide and up to 4’ to 8’ tall. In order to maximize Redosier Dogwood stem color, you can remove one third of the oldest canes each year, or just cut the whole plant back to the ground in late winter. It is a very hardy shrub that tolerates moist locations, and is rarely bothered by deer. Redosier Dogwood is available in green, golden and variegated leaf forms. Its white flowers in spring are followed by clusters of whitish or blue tinted fruit in summer. This shrub is particularly effective when grown in groups or hedges, as the mass of winter stem color is stunning!

Cultivars:

‘Argenteo-marginata’ (‘Elegantissima’) – has variegated leaves with creamy white border and a lighter center, as well as red stems in winter. A very pretty plant for brightening up a shady area of the yard.

‘Aurea’ – A yellow-green leaved variety, leaves turn bright yellow in autumn.

‘Sibirica’ – More compact than the species, it has a bright coral-red stem color.

‘Sibirica’ variegata – a variegated form of the above

‘Spaethii’ – Has golden edged leaves, that do not sunburn.

‘Flaviramea’ - A yellow stemmed form, with a hint of green at its base.



***Cornus alba* ‘Sibirica variegata’**