

FLOWERING TREES AND SHRUBS

Landscape designers often refer to trees and shrubs as the bones of a garden or landscape—the elements that provide structure. But you can also think of flowering trees and shrubs as the things that will extend your gardening season and bring color and interest to your yard in even the dreariest months. They can offer blooms, fall foliage, berries, interesting shades of bark, and different textures. Another bonus: many flowering trees and shrubs are low maintenance and don't require much work once they're settled in the ground.

You may sometimes hear the term “woodies,” which simply refers to trees and shrubs (as opposed to herbaceous perennials, which may look like some shrubs but they die back down to the roots each year).

Before you pick your plant

Flowering trees and shrubs come in all shapes and sizes. There's a lot to choose from, but before you even start picking out plants, you can make life a lot easier by narrowing the selection based on your own needs.

The biggest mistake people make with trees and shrubs is buying plants that eventually outgrow their space. For example, an attractive 3-ft. golden vicary privet may look like the perfect shrub for your doorstep when it's sitting in the garden center, but it'll reach 4 to 6 ft. high at maturity. This is a simple problem to avoid when you arm yourself with a few facts on the *mature* height and width of the tree or shrub you have in mind. And remember that you need to look at the specific variety. While lilacs may average 8 or 10 ft. tall, one specific variety reaches more than 15 ft.

First, take a look at where you want to plant flowering trees or shrubs. What kind of light does it get? Do you have a lot of sun-loving plants already established in the ground that will continue to need high light levels? If so, look for shorter options that won't overtake the space or provide too much shade. Do you have any structures that may get in the way as the tree or shrub grows?

If you'll be planting near pools, ponds or walkways (or if dropping leaves or berries aren't your thing), you may also want to



Rhododendron catawbiense 'Nova Zembla'

All photos courtesy of Pam Duthie

evaluate the mess and cleanup of trees that bear fruit, nuts, seedpods or berries or those that lose their leaves in the fall. At the very least, it may be wise to locate them so all the leaves don't fall into your swimming pool.

Another pre-buying question to ask yourself is how much maintenance do you want to do? Some shrubs may need to be pruned or mulched, others may need extra protection during the winter.

And that brings us to the final point: Check the USDA Hardiness Zone. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has a handy map that tells you which Zone you live in, and the tags on trees, shrubs, and perennials will tell you which zones it will survive the winter in. (Of course, you may be able to squeeze by in a borderline zone if you have a well-protected area.) Ask your garden center if you're not sure which zone you're in or visit www.usna.usda.gov/Hardzone/ushzmap.html.



Each issue, *Green Profit* organizes a ready-made class on livegood and hardgood topics in the form of a magazine page you can tear out, even giving it to customers who want questions answered, myths debunked and a reason to be in a garden environment, regardless of the season. You provide the customers and example products; we'll do the rest.



Aronia melanocarpa 'Viking' (Black Chokeberry)

Planting

Going over the tips for picking what kinds of plants to buy will also give you a good sense of what to watch out for in terms of where to plant. Make sure it will fit in with the surrounding plants, the available light, and any buildings, walkways or driveways.

Soil: Most trees and shrubs need two things: moist and well-drained soil. Poor drainage can be a killer for plants. So, if you have heavy clay soil, mix in some coarse, decomposed compost when you dig the hole for planting. If you have really sandy soil that drains too fast, adding both compost and topsoil should do the trick.

Digging: Start by digging a hole that's a couple of inches deeper and wider than the root ball of the tree or shrub you're planting. (Here's where you'd mix the soil you just dug up with the compost and/or topsoil; then put a little bit of that soil mix back into the bottom of the hole.) Take your tree or shrub out of its container or burlap sack and gently tease some of the roots downwards with your fingers. After this, you can settle the root ball into the hole so the top of it is even with the soil level. Fill in the rest of the hole with soil and water. (You will likely need to add more soil after this as the initial watering causes the soil to sink down.)

Composting: In general, most trees and shrubs will benefit from 1 to 2 in. of mulch around the planting area; this will help conserve water.

Exceptions: A few plants, such as azaleas and rhododendrons, require special directions for planting. For these, dig a much wider hole, but not quite as deep; you'll want the root ball to be an inch or two above the surface. A pine bark mulch is recommended for the top, but don't put the mulch around the base of the plant.

Getting specific

We don't have the space here to give you a complete guide of flowering trees and shrubs. But here are a few examples to get you thinking. And while the focus here is the flowering type, don't forget that these can also have attractive foliage, fruit, branches or bark.

Apple serviceberry: A deciduous tree that has white clusters of flowers in early spring, then red fruit in June that eventually turns a darker color. Grows up to 20 ft. tall and 15 to 20 ft. wide. USDA Hardiness Zones 4–9.

Black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*): This deciduous shrub starts out with fragrant white flower cultures with purple-black berries. In the fall, the green leaves will turn a bright, orange-red color. USDA Hardiness Zones 4–8.

Crabapple trees (*Malus*): Choose from a wide range of crabapple trees, which are deciduous. Various varieties bloom pink, red, or white flowers in the spring, with clusters of berries. Heights can vary from 10 to 20 ft., and trees may get 10 to 20 ft. wide, as well. Many are in USDA Hardiness Zones 4–8.

Fragrant winter hazel (*Corylopsis glabrescens*): A deciduous shrub that blooms in early spring with yellow chains of flowers. Grows 8 to 15 ft. tall, and 8 to 15 ft. wide. USDA Hardiness Zones 5–8.

Hydrangeas: These deciduous shrubs usually grow 3 to 8 ft. tall, depending on the type. Likewise, USDA Hardiness Zones will vary, but you can find varieties ranging from Zones 3 to 9. Usually flowers from late June on. Hydrangeas require lots of water, so be sure to provide adequate irrigation.

Lilacs: A classic shrub, lilacs can grow anywhere from 6 to 15-plus ft. tall, depending on the cultivar. Look for fragrant blooms in the spring. USDA Hardiness Zones vary depending on the cultivar but often range between Zone 3 and Zone 7.

Rhododendrons: This family of shrubs is enormous (all azaleas are in the rhododendron family, too), and you'll find both broadleaf evergreen and deciduous types. In general, they grow anywhere from 2 to 10 ft. tall and 2 to 6 ft. wide. You'll get flowers in spring, and the leaves will often turn various colors in the fall. Rhododendrons and azaleas can be found for just about every climate. When planting, be sure the root ball is at the surface or slightly above; planting too deep may kill the plant. 🍃

—by Jennifer Duffield White, with special thanks to Pam Duthie,
author of *Continuous Color: A month-by-month guide to shrubs and small trees for the continuous bloom garden* (available from Ball Publishing).