

Selecting Landscape Plants: Broad-Leaved Evergreens

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There are a large number of highly ornamental broad-leaved evergreens. However, many of them require special attention if they are to develop into attractive, long-lived plants.

Wide fluctuations in temperature, prolonged dry periods, drying winds, and bright sunshine are not ideal conditions for most broad-leaved evergreens, yet these conditions frequently occur in Virginia. Good soil preparation and a carefully selected location will help ensure the success of these plants. However, the year-round beauty and special effect that they give to the landscape make them well worth the extra care needed to grow them.

The broad-leaved evergreens are valued chiefly for their evergreen foliage, but many of them possess other desirable ornamental traits. They are generally clean plants, dropping few leaves at any one time. They also offer a range of foliage colors and textures for landscape interest.

Broad-leaved evergreens prefer a rich, well-drained, slightly acid soil. Increasing organic matter content and improving drainage can modify an existing poor soil to one in which they will grow successfully.

Locate those broad-leaved evergreens subject to winter injury in areas where they receive protection from the wind and afternoon sun, especially in winter. North and east sides of buildings are ideal. Wind and sun protection provided by fences or large plants will also help prevent injury. In the Tidewater area, protection from the hot afternoon summer sun of southern and western exposures may be needed.

Broad-leaved evergreens are best fertilized in the winter or spring. Summer or fall fertilization may induce late season growth that is highly susceptible to winter injury. Winter scorch of foliage can also develop if plants dry out during the winter. To prevent this, water plants in late summer and fall if rainfall has been deficient.

Plant size is also important for the winter hardiness of some species. A small, young plant may be easily killed while the same species may be quite hardy when larger-sized plants are used. Poor culture, attacks by insects or disease, or any other factor that weakens a plant makes it more subject to winter injury.

The plants described in the following section are generally hardy in all parts of the state unless otherwise indicated. When broad-leaved evergreens are planted and located properly, they can add year-round interest to the landscape and provide a pleasant contrast to needle-leaved evergreens in both winter and summer.

Broad-Leaved Evergreen Trees

American Holly

Ilex opaca

The spiny, evergreen leaves and bright red berries of American holly are familiar to most people. It is native throughout Virginia and is moderate-growing, eventually developing into a small tree.

The sexes of holly are on separate plants. Some plants produce only male flowers and others produce only female flowers. Only the female plants produce berries, but both sexes must be present to ensure fruiting. One male plant is enough to pollinate the flowers of six to eight female plants.

Acid soils high in organic matter and with good drainage are essential for growing hollies. (40 to 50 ft. height; 18 to 40 ft. spread).

Fosters Holly

Ilex x attenuata 'Fosteri'

Narrow, evergreen leaves and a dense, branching habit make this a good specimen or accent plant when sheared, or it can be left unshaped and used as a small tree. It becomes more loose and open if used unshaped in screen plantings. It is heavily berried and does not need a male plant nearby to produce fruit. It is a faster growing form of holly. (15 to 25 ft. height; 10 to 15 ft. spread).

Live Oak

Quercus virginiana

An evergreen member of the oak family, the live oak is cold-hardy in the Tidewater area and as far north as Williamsburg. Live oak is not for small properties as it can become a large, widespreading specimen with heavy, horizontal scaffold branches.

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Live oak is tolerant of soils ranging from light sand to heavy and compacted silt and clay. In addition, it tolerates a range of moisture conditions, and even salt spray along the ocean. (30 to 40 ft. height; 40 to 60 ft. spread).

Southern Magnolia *Magnolia grandiflora*

The large, lustrous, evergreen foliage of the Southern magnolia makes it a very desirable ornamental. It develops into a large tree in southeastern Virginia, but in western Virginia its height may not exceed 20 feet due to occasional winter damage. Its large, fragrant flowers are produced more abundantly in southern areas than in northern areas.

Southern magnolia needs to be planted in a well-protected spot to survive without injury in areas north and east of central Virginia. Wind protection is essential, as the large leaves are easily damaged by winter winds. Fruit splits open to reveal large, red seeds in the fall. A desirable southern magnolia cultivar for small areas is 'Little Gem' (60 to 80 ft. height; 30 to 50 ft. spread).

Broad-Leaved Evergreen Shrubs

Many broad-leaved evergreens make attractive and useful landscape plants. However, they often require special care and placement in the landscape.

Glossy Abelia *Abelia x grandiflora*

Glossy abelia may grow to a height of 5 feet in southern areas but is smaller when grown in colder climates. It is valued for its small, pink flowers that appear from June to frost, with the cultivar 'Edward Goucher' having larger, darker-pink flowers. Abelia may be used as a specimen plant or as a small hedge.

In winter, the foliage turns purple. In severe winters, some of the foliage may drop and tops may be killed back, but new shoots develop rapidly from the base in spring. Prune the dead twigs in late spring after growth starts. (3 to 6 ft. height; equal spread).

Azalea And Rhododendron *Rhododendron spp.*

The plants commonly called azaleas and those called rhododendron all belong to the botanical genus, *Rhododendron*. It is the largest group of woody ornamental plants, with over 2000 species, varieties, and hybrids having been recognized.

Special soil conditions and cultural requirements are needed to grow azaleas and rhododendrons. Because of this and the many species and varieties available to choose from, they cannot be covered adequately here. For more details of their culture and selection, see Virginia Cooperative Extension Publication 426-602, *Growing Azaleas and Rhododendrons*. (1 to 25 ft. height; 2 to 25 ft. spread).

Wintergreen Barberry *Berberis julianae*

Wintergreen barberry, an excellent small shrub, is attractive in the garden throughout the year. The evergreen foliage is 3 inches long, narrow, and spiny. The thorny twigs make it an excellent barrier and hedge plant though pruning can be difficult. Small, yellow flowers appear in May. Bluish-black berries add interest in the fall. Wintergreen barberry is very hardy and easily grown. (6 to 8 ft. height; 5 to 7 ft. spread).

Mentor Barberry *Berberis x mentorensis*

An extremely hardy plant, mentor barberry will adapt to almost any soil. It is a semi-evergreen shrub that will retain its leaves until mid-winter. It has been planted extensively for hedges because of its dense upright habit of growth and its thorny branches and leaf margins. Little maintenance is required to keep it looking attractive. (5 ft. height; 5 to 7 ft. spread).

Boxwood *Buxus spp.*

Boxwood has been a popular, broad-leaved evergreen for some time, particularly in eastern and southern U.S. where very old specimens can be found. Boxwoods make excellent specimen plants or hedges. They can be easily pruned to any desired shape. Of the available boxwood types, the Korean or littleleaf box is most hardy and easily grown. The leaves tend to lose color in winter; in shade, winter discoloring is less severe. The English boxwood is slow growing and intolerant of poor drainage. For details on culture and selection, see VCE Publication 426-603, *Boxwood in the Landscape*. (3 to 4 ft. height; equal spread).

Drooping Leucothoe *Leucothoe fontanesiana*

A slow-growing plant with spreading, arching branches and lustrous, dark-green leaves, it produces fragrant, bell-shaped flowers in early spring. It needs shade for best growth and is most suitable beneath large evergreens. It is related to pieris and requires the same growing conditions. (3 to 6 ft. height; equal spread).

Spreading Euonymus *Euonymus kiautschovicus*

Spreading euonymus was formerly known as *Euonymus patens*. It is evergreen in the south, but in colder areas leaves may turn brown in late winter and hang onto the plant until new leaves are produced in the spring. It grows well in full sun, but the leaves remain green longer if it gets winter shade. The fruit capsules open in the fall to reveal the bright-reddish seed that is an added attraction.

Spreading euonymus may be attacked by euonymus scale. The two varieties of spreading euonymus most commonly grown are 'Manhattan,' a variety that retains good green winter color, and 'Pauli,' which is reported to retain green winter color even better than 'Manhattan.' (8 to 10 ft. height; equal spread).

Japanese Holly *Ilex crenata*

Most Japanese hollies produce small, spineless leaves and black fruit. They are popular, small, compact evergreen shrubs. Some of the most common of the many available varieties include:

'Convexa' - An excellent variety with dark-green convex leaves, this is one of the hardiest forms. It is frequently used as a hedge. A 40 year old plant may reach 9 feet tall and 24 feet wide.

'Hetzii' - A dwarf form of 'Convexa,' this variety will grow 2 to 3 feet tall.

'Stokesii' - A hardy type, less prone to winter burn than some other types, this variety grows 2 to 3 feet high.

'Helleri' - A broad, compact, globe-shaped plant, this variety grows about 4 feet tall and up to 5 feet wide.

'Roundleaf' - This is a male selection that does not produce berries. Its rounded leaves are larger than any of the other Japanese hollies; it is more subject to winter injury. Grows 5 to 10 feet tall and 5 to 12 feet wide.

Chinese Holly

Ilex cornuta

The Chinese holly produces large, spiny, glossy, green leaves and bright-red berries. It is one of the few hollies that does not require pollination to produce berries. Therefore, there is no reason to plant the male forms. Chinese holly is very popular where it can be grown, but may suffer some winter damage in northern and western Virginia. The most commonly grown varieties of Chinese holly are:

'Burfordii' -A popular variety with deep-green, glossy leaves; its leaf margins are smooth, with only one leaf spine generally present at the tip. It is a heavy fruiter, but it is less hardy than the common Chinese holly. It grows 10 to 20 feet tall and wide.

'Dwarf Burford' -A smaller, slower-growing selection of standard Burford, this variety reaches 5 to 8 feet in height and is usually wider than high.

'Dwarf Chinese Holly' -A compact, slow-growing form of Chinese Holly, it has the typical spiny leaves of the species. It produces red fruit, but the berries are generally hidden by the dense foliage.

Yaupon Holly

Ilex vomitoria

An extremely versatile plant hardy in the Tidewater area and into central Virginia, yaupon holly can be used as a foundation plant, hedge, screen, and even as an espalier and small tree. Similar to Japanese holly in leaf shape, a purplish tinge to the new leaves and white to gray bark help to distinguish it. In addition, the fruit of the yaupon is red and often borne in very showy clusters, while the fruit of Japanese holly is black and not showy. Especially popular are dwarf and pendulous forms. Very tolerant of moist areas. (5 [dwarf] to 15 ft. height; 5 to 10 ft. spread).

Inkberry

Ilex glabra

The inkberry, a native black-fruited holly, is not as attractive an ornamental as the other hollies, but it is one of the most hardy of the group and makes a good hedge or screen. Leaf size, shape, and glossiness vary considerably. The selection 'Compacta' should be used in the landscape. Occasional pruning will keep the plant from developing a loose, open type of growth. It should be used in place of Japanese holly where poor soil drainage exists. (6 to 8 ft. height; 8 to 10 ft. spread).

Japanese Pieris

Pieris japonica

Formerly called andromeda, pieris is an attractive, broad-leaved evergreen. The new foliage is bronze in color in spring, soon turning a lustrous medium-green. The flowers, borne in late March, are creamy-white and hang in long, drooping clusters. The plant needs protection from winter sun and wind to prevent leaf scorch and flower bud damage. A light, well-drained, acid soil high in organic matter will produce the best plants. (9 to 12 ft. height; 6 to 8 ft. spread).

Leatherleaf Viburnum

Viburnum rhytidophyllum

A coarse-textured shrub that may eventually grow 10 feet tall, its large, wrinkled leaves persist well during cold weather. In late winter, leaves turn yellowish and drop off as new foliage emerges in spring. The leaves are up to 6 inches long, and the flat clusters of white flowers are not as showy as the red to black berries that follow.

Leatherleaf viburnum prefers a well-drained soil with protection from afternoon sun, especially in winter. It is often used in corner plantings or for accent in the shrub border. (10 to 15 ft. height; equal spread).

Nandina

Nandina domestica

The unbranched, reed-like stems with evergreen leaves clustered at the tip give this plant an exotic, bamboo-like appearance. It is best known for its clusters of bright-red fruit in the fall and winter. It is a highly ornamental plant that grows and fruits best in the warmer parts of Virginia. Several dwarf cultivars, useful as edging plants, are available. (2 to 10 ft. height; 3 to 5 ft. spread).

Oregon Grapeholly

Mahonia aquifolium

Oregon grapeholly is a fairly coarse, stiff shrub that may reach 6 feet. In April, the plant is covered with bright-yellow flowers. In summer, bluish-black, grape-like fruits develop. The compound leaves are dark, lustrous, and holly-like. In winter, the leaves turn a bronze-purple color. This shrub is usually semi-evergreen and much of the foliage dies in the winter. Protection from winter sun and wind will help it remain attractive. (3 to 9 ft. height; 3 to 5 ft. spread).

Leatherleaf Mahonia

Mahonia bealei

The large, leathery, compound evergreen leaves are held stiffly horizontal on the shrub, making it an interesting specimen. When grown in partial shade, the leaves do not change color in the fall. It flowers and fruits like Oregon grapeholly but is not as hardy and may need a well-protected, shady spot to survive in western Virginia. (6 to 10 ft. height; variable spread).

Pyracantha/Firethorn

Pyracantha coccinea

Pyracantha is an evergreen to semi-evergreen shrub. It produces showy, small, white flowers in the spring, but the clusters of bright-orange berries produced in the fall, hanging on the plant until mid-winter, are its main attraction. Pyracantha can be grown as an individual specimen plant, hedge, or barrier. It can be trained flat against a wall or on a trellis to look like a vine or espalier. It normally grows 6 to 7 feet tall and can spread to almost twice as wide, so ample space must be given for the plant to fully develop. Dwarf varieties are available for smaller areas, as are varieties with brighter-red fruit.

Pyracantha is one of the few plants that seems to do best on poor soil. Good soil and high fertility produce rampant growth susceptible to disease (fireblight) and low in berry production. The plant has several insect problems to watch for, including lacebug and spider mite. (2 to 10 ft. height; equal spread).

Japanese Aucuba***Aucuba japonica***

This is a good shrub for use under tall trees since it requires shade. Several cultivars exist, but the most popular, used mainly for foundation plantings, has yellow-flecked leaves (gold dust plant). In colder parts of the state, aucuba frequently dies to the ground in winter (6 to 15 ft. height; 5 to 8 ft. spread).

Japanese Camellia***Camellia japonica***

Camellias are attractive southern evergreens prized for their flowers and the fact that they bloom from winter to early spring. They are best used in partial shade and a protected area. Many flower colors and variegations are available. There are numerous insects and diseases can be problems. (10 to 20 ft. height; 6 to 10 ft. spread).

Sasanqua Camellia***Camellia sasanqua***

A smaller, more finely-textured camellia than Japanese camellia. Many cultivars are available with flower colors ranging from white to deep rosy red. Slightly less cold hardy than Japanese camellia and blooms slightly earlier. (6 to 10 ft. height, variable spread).

Cotoneaster***Cotoneaster spp.***

The cotoneaster genus includes both deciduous and evergreen species. There is generally an evergreen species available to fit any need, from a prostrate ground cover to an upright screen. The cotoneasters have small, white, rose-like flowers and small, applelike, red or black fruit. Numerous insects and diseases can be problems. It is not hardy in western Virginia. (10 to 20 ft. height; 6 to 10 ft. spread).

Mountain Laurel***Kalmia latifolia***

This beautiful shrub has buds and flowers in many pink, rose, and red colors. One of the prettiest shrubs available for both sun and shade locations, it is native to portions of Virginia. A moist, well-drained, acid soil is necessary. (3 to 15 ft. height; 3 to 15 ft. spread).

Fraser Photinia/Red Tip***Photinia x fraseri***

This showy photinia hybrid is popular for the red color of the new foliage. Use as a hedge or screen; if not heavily pruned, it blooms with clusters of cream-colored flowers in the summer. It is overplanted in the Tidewater area where it is very susceptible to a leaf spot (*Entomosporium*) disease. (10 to 20 ft. height; 10 to 15 ft. spread).

**Waxleaf Ligustrum/
Japanese Privet*****Ligustrum japonicum***

A very adaptable shrub with large, glossy, dark-green leaves, it will grow in sun or shade. Used as foundation plants, hedges, screens, and topiaries, it tolerates heavy pruning well. Cool hardy only in southeastern Virginia. (6 to 18 ft. height; 6 to 8 ft. spread).

Holly Osmanthus***Osmanthus heterophyllus***

Holly osmanthus or false-holly is often confused with English holly because of the shape of its leaves. Osmanthus can be separated from the hollies because its leaves are arranged in an opposite, rather than an alternate, position along the stems.

Hardy in the Tidewater area and into central Virginia, osmanthus is very noticeable in the fall when it is covered with small, exceedingly fragrant, holly-like flowers. The plant adapts well to urban conditions and heavy pruning. (8 to 10 ft. height; spread may equal height).

**Cherrylaurel/
English Laurel*****Prunus laurocerasus***

A large-leaved plant that prunes well into screens and hedges, cherrylaurel is rated as hardy for all of Virginia, but is seen less in the western part of the state than in the east. Where hardiness is questionable, the hardier cultivar 'Skiptaensis' should be used.

Cherrylaurel adapts well to sun and shade, and will tolerate salt spray along the ocean. If the flowers are not kept away by heavy pruning, a rather sickening fragrance may be noticed when the plant blooms in the spring. (10 to 18 ft. height; 25 to 30 ft. spread).

Northern Bayberry***Myrica pennsylvanica***

Bayberry is grown for its aromatic, semi-evergreen leaves and its waxy, gray berries. Because of their fragrance, the berries are frequently used in making candles. The sexes of bayberry are usually separate so both male and female plants need to be planted together to ensure production of the ornamental berries.

Bayberry grows vigorously on good soil but will generally fruit more heavily when grown on poor soil. It is a fine ornamental, used for its foliage as well as its fruit. It is very salt tolerant and is well-adapted for the Tidewater area where the southern wax myrtle, *M. cerifera*, is used. (5 to 12 ft. height; 5 to 10 ft. spread).

Additional evergreen shrubs to consider, especially for the Tidewater area, include cleyera, pittosporum, gardenia, fatsia, daphne, and Indian hawthorn.

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