



Problem-free Shrubs for Virginia Landscapes

Mary Ann Hansen, Department of Plant Pathology, Physiology, and Weed Science, Virginia Tech

Alex Niemiera, Department of Horticulture, Virginia Tech

Eric Day, Department of Entomology, Virginia Tech

The most effective form of plant disease control in the landscape is prevention. Disease prevention can be as simple as choosing the right plant for the right place at planting time. This fact sheet was developed as a guide to shrubs that generally experience few problems in Virginia landscapes. Using these species for new plantings should help you avoid troublesome disease and insect problems in your landscape.

All of the species or cultivars described have been chosen for their relative disease- and insect-free qualities and their desirable horticultural attributes. The list was reviewed by a plant pathologist, an entomologist, and a horticulturist and includes information on some of the pertinent cultural

characteristics of each species to help you decide whether the shrub is the right choice for the landscape you have in mind. Plants marked with an asterisk (*) are native to the eastern U.S. All photos were taken by A. Niemiera (second author). Information for several other recommend problem-free shrubs (with details but no photos) occurs in Table 1 (at end of section with photos).

Although some species are not listed here because they tend to have disease or insect problems, resistant cultivars of some of these species may be available. Consult your local nursery personnel or Extension agent for recommendations on the latest cultivars.

Problem-free Shrubs

***Berberis xgladwynensis* ‘William Penn’ (William Penn barberry)** is a medium, evergreen shrub that is armed with spines. This densely growing barberry has somewhat showy (upon close inspection) yellow flowers in spring and is relatively drought-tolerant. William Penn barberry is typically used as a low hedge or in border plantings. Some winter damage can occur in Zone 6a.



www.ext.vt.edu

Produced by Communications and Marketing, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Virginia Tech, 2016

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Edwin J. Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; M. Ray McKinnie, Interim Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State University, Petersburg.

VT/0316/PPWS-69P

*Cephalanthus occidentalis** (**buttonbush**) is a large shrub that produces white flowers in globular heads in June, July, and August. Buttonbush is somewhat lanky, but is a good choice for informal landscapes. It does best in moist soil and does not tolerate drought.



*Clethra alnifolia** (**sweet pepperbush**) is tolerant of wet soils. It tends to form colonies slowly, and the cultivar ‘Sixteen Candles’ remains compact. Its very fragrant white flowers open in July. Pictured here is the pink-flowered cultivar ‘Pink Spires’.



Cornus alba (**Tatarian dogwood**) has beautiful, red stems in winter. Although several diseases are reported to occur on this species, experience shows that disease problems are rare on *C. alba* in Virginia landscapes. Japanese beetles can be a problem and borers sometimes follow mechanical injury to the plants. *C. alba* is quite vigorous and can sometimes overgrow neighboring shrubs. Variegated cultivars, such as the one pictured here, are available. *Cornus sericea** has similar attributes to *C. alba*.



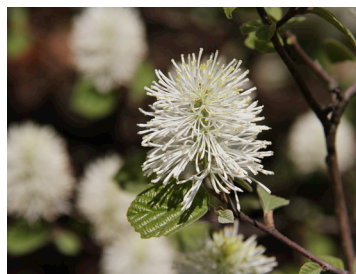
***Cornus mas* (Corneliancherry dogwood)** is a large, multi-stemmed shrub or small tree. It has attractive, flaky bark and small but showy, yellow flowers in early spring. Cherry-like red fruit are showy for about a month in summer. Fruit may pose a mess if near a walkway or patio. Several cultivars, including variegated ones, are available.



***Forsythia xintermedia* (border forsythia)** is a common, large, fast-growing shrub with very showy flowers in spring that suffers few disease and insect problems, but needs frequent grooming. Phomopsis gall, a fungal disease associated with dieback, is occasionally a problem on forsythia stems. Border forsythia is adaptable to a wide range of soils. Full sun is best for flowering.



***Fothergilla gardenii** (dwarf fothergilla)** is a medium, slow-growing multi-stemmed shrub species. It has beautiful flowers (April) and very showy fall foliage but is slightly less showy than *F. major*. It flowers and shows its fall colors best in full sun. Dwarf fothergilla requires a moist, well-drained acid soil and does not tolerate drought. The cultivar 'Mt. Airy' exhibits the best characteristics of the species. *Fothergilla major* is a larger version of *F. gardenia* with the same showy flower and fall foliage characteristics.



*Hydrangea arborescens** (smooth hydrangea) is a medium native shrub that produces pretty white flowers in July. It prefers partial shade, but can be grown in full sun with supplemental water. It can be cut back every year because it flowers on new wood. Pictured here is the cultivar 'Annabelle'. Stems of large flowered cultivars (such as 'Annabelle') will flop from the weight of the flowers; staking stems can remedy this situation.



Hydrangea macrophylla (bigleaf hydrangea) is a round medium shrub that prefers moist, well-drained soil. Flowers are blue in acid soil (< pH 5.5) and pink when soil pH is above 6.0. Flower buds may be killed in Zone 6, but this species does well from Roanoke eastward. Cultivars that vary in hardiness and flower type, and cultivars that flower on new wood are available.



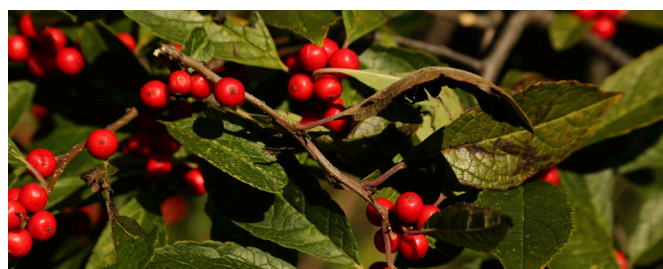
*Hydrangea quercifolia** (oakleaf hydrangea) is an upright medium shrub with nice fall foliage color and leaves that remain on the plant until late in the fall. It sometimes develops leaf spot, but plants still seem to thrive. It grows best in moist, well-drained soil and in sun to partial shade. Many cultivars that vary in size and flower characteristics are available.



*Ilex cornuta*¹ (**Chinese holly**) cultivars do well in Zones 7a-8 in Virginia. This species is a beautiful evergreen shrub that withstands heat and drought. A few cultivars of this species have leaves with very sharp teeth (e.g., 'Rotunda', photo lower left) and one must be careful where such cultivars are placed. The cultivar 'Burfordii' has a single spine at the tip of the leaf (three photos to the right). Some diseases are reported, but we rarely see them in Virginia. Scales, followed by sooty mold, can be a problem on this and other holly species, however.



*Ilex verticillata** (**winterberry**) is a medium to large slow-growing shrub species that does well in both heavy and light soils, but is native to swampy areas and prefers moist, acid soils high in organic matter. It produces persistent red berries that are a nice accent to the winter landscape. At least one male plant must be planted among female plants for fruit production. The cultivar 'Winter Red' is a prolific fruit-producer. Compact, dwarf cultivars, such as 'Red Sprite,' are also available.



*Ilex vomitoria**¹ (**Yaupon holly**) is adapted to both dry and wet soils. Like other hollies, it is susceptible to scales and sooty mold. *I. vomitoria* is suitable for Zones 7-9. There are several cultivars, which vary in size and form (from small shrub to small tree). Pictured here is the dwarf cultivar 'Nana'.



¹Although both *I. cornuta* and *I. vomitoria* are susceptible to scales and sooty mold, they are included because few other evergreen shrubs are listed and these species of *Ilex* do perform well in many landscapes.

Juniperus chinensis (**Chinese juniper**) cultivars vary in size from medium shrubs to small trees. Like all junipers, this species needs full sun. Many cultivars are susceptible to the fungal diseases, Phomopsis blight and Kabatina tip blight, but some cultivars, such as 'Keteleeri,' 'Pfizeriana' (pictured bottom left), 'Pfizeriana Aurea' (top left photo), var. *sargentii*, and var. *sargentii* 'Glaucua' have resistance to these diseases. The upright cultivar pictured on the right is 'Torulosa.'



Juniperus conferta (**shore juniper**) is a low-growing ground cover that has lush, bluish foliage when grown in the right soil. The main problem seen on this species is stress from being planted in poorly drained soils. Shore juniper can tolerate dry, sandy soils, but does poorly in heavy, clay soils. The prevalent cultivar in the trade is 'Blue Pacific,' pictured here.



Mahonia aquifolium (**Oregon grapeholly**) is a medium evergreen shrub that has showy, yellow flowers in April and showy blue fruit in early summer, but it must be planted in the correct location. It prefers shade and moist, well-drained soil. It may develop symptoms of scorch in full sun. It is also sensitive to high pH and exhibits chlorosis in alkaline soils.



***Mahonia bealei* (leatherleaf mahonia)**, like *M. aquifolium*, is a medium evergreen shrub that bears beautiful blue fruit and requires shade. It bears lemon-yellow, fragrant flowers in early spring. There are some reports of this species being somewhat invasive.



***Myrica pensylvanica** (northern bayberry)** is a medium to large deciduous shrub that does best in Zones 3-6, and, therefore, can mainly be considered for western and northern Virginia. It grows well in both poor, sandy soils and in heavy, clay soils, but may develop chlorosis in alkaline soils. It can be grown in full sun to half shade. It may get large but can be pruned. At least one male should be planted among female plants to produce silver small fruit that are relatively showy in the winter. Many cultivars that vary in hardiness are available. ***Myrica cerifera** (southern waxmyrtle)** is a large evergreen shrub (Zones 7-11) that will also tolerate wet and dry soils. Both species will sucker (produce shoots from their roots) and thus will produce a colony of stems. This characteristic may be a disadvantage since a plant may invade an adjacent bed space. The genus name, *Myrica*, has been changed to *Morella* but this species is mostly listed as *Myrica*.



***Rhus typhina** (staghorn sumac)** is a large shrub or small tree that is known for being “hard to kill” and has very showy fall foliage color. Although this species is reported to be susceptible to Verticillium wilt, this disease has not been a problem on *Rhus typhina* in Virginia. Female plants have persistent, showy, red fruit stalks. Staghorn sumac tolerates dry soil, but does not do well in poorly drained areas.



***Syringa meyeri* 'Palibin' (Meyer lilac)**, a medium, dense shrub, is resistant to powdery mildew, which commonly afflicts the common lilac, *Syringa vulgaris*. It needs full sun for maximum flowering, which occurs in April. Flowers are very fragrant. *Syringa patula* 'Miss Kim' has similar attributes to 'Palibin' but bears its very fragrant flowers in May.



***Viburnum xburkwoodii* (burkwood viburnum)** is a large shrub that flowers in April. It has very fragrant flowers, is relatively drought-tolerant, and has fair to good fall color. It is often used for shrub borders. Pictured here is the cultivar 'Mohawk'.



***Viburnum carlesii* (Koreanspice viburnum)** is one of the parents of the burkwood viburnum and has the same traits listed for that hybrid. The popular cultivar 'Compactum' is more dense and compact than the species.



Viburnum dentatum* (arrowwood viburnum) is a multi-stemmed, dense, large shrub. It is adapted to a variety of soils and can be grown in sun or partial shade. It has no serious pests or diseases and is valued for its durability and white flowers.



Viburnum dilatatum (linden viburnum) grows best in moist, slightly acid soil. It produces many flowers, but the flowers have an unpleasant odor. The newer cultivars are more compact and less leggy. If grown in Zone 8 (the Virginia Beach area), it should be grown in partial shade and the soil should be kept moist. Some cultivars, such as ‘Asian Beauty’ can have very showy fruit if there are other cultivars of this species in the vicinity (for cross pollination).



Viburnum nudum* (possumhaw viburnum) is a native large shrub or small tree with lustrous, dark green leaves and a spreading, rounded crown. Flowers occur in long-stemmed, flat-topped clusters and fruit, which is black at maturity, persists through the winter. Possumhaw viburnum does well in average to moist soil. The cultivar ‘Winterthur,’ pictured here, is prevalent in the trade.



Viburnum plicatum var. *tomentosum* (**doublefile viburnum**) is a medium to large shrub, depending on the cultivar. It has a horizontal form and very showy white flowers in May. The berries are also quite striking and remain on the plants for about two weeks in early fall. Some cultivars also have showy fall foliage color.



*Viburnum prunifolium** (**blackhaw viburnum**) may be a multi-stemmed shrub or a small tree. Its growth habit is similar to some of the hawthorns. It does well in dry soil, is adapted to many soil types, can be grown in sun or shade, and has no serious disease or insect pests. It produces showy, white flowers in May followed by showy pink, turning to blue-black fruit.



Table 1. Additional recommended shrubs for Virginia.

Name	Shrub size**	Hardiness zones	Native to U.S.	Notes
<i>Abelia xgrandiflora</i> - glossy abelia	Medium to large	6 to 9	No	Evergreen shrub with showy white flowers in summer to frost; usually deciduous in zone 6
<i>Aronia melanocarpa</i> - black chokeberry	Medium	3 to 8	Yes	Showy white flowers in spring; somewhat showy black fruit in fall/early winter; tolerates wet and dry soils; suckers to form a colony of stems
<i>Callicarpa americana</i> - American beautyberry	Medium to large	6 to 11	Yes	Showy purple fruit in fall; informal appearance
<i>Calycanthus floridus</i> - common sweetshrub	Medium	3 to 8	Yes	Individual flowers (maroon) showy upon close inspection; fragrant flowers, but this aspect varies from plant to plant; shade-tolerant
<i>Deutzia gracilis</i> 'Nikko' - nikko slender deutzia	Small	4 to 8	No	Compact form of the species; showy white flowers in spring; tolerates adverse conditions
<i>Fothergilla</i> 'Mount Airy' - Mount Airy fothergilla	Small	5 to 9	Yes	Showy white flowers in spring; very showy fall foliage color; slow-growing and suckers to form a colony of stems; languishes in alkaline soil
<i>Itea virginica</i> - Virginia sweet-spire	Medium	5 to 9	Yes	Showy white flowers in late spring; showy and persistent maroon fall foliage color; tolerates wet soils; intolerant of alkaline soil; may develop fungal leaf spot
<i>Jasminum nudiflorum</i> - winter jasmine	Small	6 to 10	No	Showy yellow flowers in winter; tolerates adverse conditions
<i>Loropetalum chinense</i> - Chinese fringe-flower	Large	7 to 9	No	Evergreen foliage; fleece-like fragrant flowers in spring; cultivars of var. <i>rubrum</i> have pink to purple-pink flowers and purplish foliage
<i>Potentilla fruticosa</i> - bush cinquefoil	Small to medium	2 to 6	Yes	Showy yellow flowers in summer; tolerates adverse soil conditions; does not tolerate hot climates of zone 7 and higher
<i>Spiraea</i> spp. - spirea	Varies with species and cultivar	Mostly 4 (3) to 8 (7)	No	<i>S. japonica</i> and <i>S. xbumalda</i> - numerous cultivars with varying flower, foliage, and plant-form characteristics; <i>S. japonica</i> has proven to be invasive; <i>S. vanhouttei</i> - medium shrub, with very showy white flowers in spring
<i>Taxus</i> spp. - yew species and cultivars	Varies with species and cultivar	Varies with species	No	Evergreen needle-leaved plants mostly used as foundation, border, or hedge function; shade-tolerant; deer love to eat this plant; all plant parts except fleshy red seed covering (aril) are poisonous; absolute requirement for well-drained soil
<i>Viburnum macrocephalum</i> - Chinese snowball viburnum	Large	3 to 8	No	Large very showy white flowers in spring

**Shrub sizes: small, less than 5 feet tall; medium, 5 feet to less than 9 feet tall; large, 9 feet or taller.

References

- Dirr, M.A. 2009. Manual of Woody Landscape Plants, 6th ed. Stipes Publishing L.L.C., Champaign, Ill. 1325 pp.
- Flint, H.L. 1983. Landscape Plants for Eastern North America. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, N.J. 677 pp.
- Johnson, W.T., and Lyon, H.H. 1991. Insects that Feed on Trees and Shrubs, 2nd edition. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., and London, UK. 560 pp.
- Sinclair, W.A., and Lyon, H.H. 2005. Diseases of Trees and Shrubs, 2nd edition. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., and London, UK. 660 pp.
- Whitcomb, C.E. 1996. Know It & Grow It. Lacebark, Inc., P.O. Box 2383, Stillwater, Okla.