

Selecting Shrubs for Shady Areas



CONTENTS

	Page
Shrubs	3
Kinds of shade	3
Selecting shrubs	3
Japanese andromeda	4
Aralia	4
Arrowwood	4
Aucuba	4
Warty barberry	4
Common camellia	5
Sasanqua camellia	6
Coralberry	7
Mountain cranberry	7
Gray dogwood	8
Alabama fothergilla	8
Fringetree	8
Japanese holly	9
Oregon hollygrape	9
English ivy	10
Jetbead	10
Drooping leucothoë	10
Mountain-laurel	10
Nandina	10
Periwinkle	10
Pittosporum	10
Glossy privet	11
California rhododendron	11
Rosebay rhododendron	11
Salal	12
Fragrant sarcococca	13
Japanese skimmia	13
Summersweet	13
Sweetbay	14
Mapleleaf viburnum	14
Wintercreeper	14
Yellowroot	14
Preparing the soil	14
Planting and care	15

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SHRUBS

Many kinds of shrubs are easy to grow in shady areas, and once established they require little care. Regular watering during dry periods and some fertilizing during the growing season will satisfy the needs of most shrubs.

To grow shrubs in shady areas—

- Start with nursery-grown stock adapted to your area.
- Plant during late winter or early spring in well-prepared soil.
- Maintain a mulch around them.
- Water regularly.

KINDS OF SHADE

Most shrubs can use some shade—a few must have it. However, different types of shrubs will tolerate different kinds of shade.

Shrubs listed in this publication do well in four kinds of shade—full shade, open shade, half shade, and light shade.

Full Shade Under Trees.—Areas of full shade occur under low-branching trees with heavy foliage; therefore, shrubs in these areas get practically no direct sunlight during the growing season. Also, these areas may be unfavorable for shrub growth because the shrub roots are constantly competing with the tree roots for the available soil moisture.

Open Shade.—This kind of shade can be found in areas next to the north side of high walls, buildings, or trees. These areas are in full shade but are open to the sky.

Half Shade.—Areas of half shade get direct sunlight either in the morning or afternoon. This kind of shade is similar to open shade and is caused by a high wall or building facing east or west.

Light Shade.—Areas of light shade get a broken flow of sunlight. This is caused by sunlight filtering through the leaves of high-branching trees.

SELECTING SHRUBS

When you select a shrub, consider whether you want to—

- Beautify an area by planting masses of colorful flowers, berries, or foliage.
- Screen a particular view.
- Accent the lines of a building.

A single kind of shrub may satisfy all these needs.

Some shrubs, the low ones, are best used for ground cover or borders; some, the tall ones, are best used for screens; and some, the colorful ones, are best used for ornamental groupings.

Before selecting a shrub for your garden, make sure it will grow well in your hardiness zone. Cold hardiness is the plant's tolerance to low

temperature. This is the most important factor in determining where a plant may be grown. In this publication, the numbers at the end of each shrub's description indicate the climatic zones in which that shrub will normally grow. You can find out which zone you are in by looking at the plant hardiness map on page 16.

Visit local gardens—see what grows well in your area. You can get advice about selecting shrubs from your nurseryman, county agricultural agent, or State extension horticulturist.

Shrubs growing wild in the woods are generally harder to transplant and need more initial care than shrubs you buy from a nursery.

The following list contains descriptions of some of the more common shrubs that will do well in shady areas.

***Andromeda, Japanese**

Japanese andromeda (*Pieris japonica*) is an evergreen shrub that grows 5 to 8 feet under cultivation. It is valued for its shiny dark-green foliage and early flowers similar to lily of the valley. The young foliage is a rich reddish bronze. Japanese andromeda is used as a background or specimen plant. (A specimen plant is one that can be grown alone for display purposes.) Plant in light shade. Zones 6 to 9.

* Plants marked with an asterisk require acid soil and should not be selected for areas having neutral or alkaline soil.

Aralia

Five-leaf aralia (*Acanthopanax sieboldianus*) is a deciduous shrub that grows 6 to 9 feet. It is valued for its shiny foliage and because it withstands city conditions. Five-leaf aralia is used as a background or screen. Plant in light to full shade. Zones 5 to 8.

Arrowwood

Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*) is a deciduous shrub that grows 8 to 15 feet. It is valued for its white flowers in late spring and its shiny red foliage in autumn. Arrowwood is used in shrub borders or massed for general foliage effects. Plant in any kind of shade. Zones 3 to 8.

Aucuba

Japanese aucuba (*Aucuba japonica*) is an evergreen shrub that grows as high as 15 feet, but generally 5 to 7 feet in cultivation. It is valued for its thick shiny foliage. There are male and female plants. Only the female bears bright red berries, but both sexes must be in the same vicinity before these berries are produced. Japanese aucuba is a vigorous shrub, which is used in the garden as a specimen plant. Plant in light to full shade. Zones 7 to 10.

Barberry, Warty

Warty barberry (*Berberis verruculosa*) is an evergreen shrub that grows to 4 feet. It is valued for its



Japanese Andromeda

golden yellow flowers in May and its shiny evergreen foliage that is white underneath. Warty barberry is used chiefly as a specimen plant or in hedges. Plant in light shade. Zones 4 to 9.

***Camellia, Common**

Common camellia (*Camellia japonica*) is an evergreen shrub that grows 15 to 30 feet, 6 to 12 feet in cultivation. It is valued for its early single

or double flowers that range from white to deep red and its shiny dark-green foliage. Common camellia is used primarily as a specimen shrub. Plant in light to open shade; it will not flower in dense shade. Zones 7 to 9.

***Camellia, Sasanqua**

Sasanqua camellia (*Camellia sas-*

anqua) is an evergreen shrub that grows 8 to 15 feet. It is valued for its single and semi-double flowers that range from white to pink and bloom in autumn. Sasanqua camellia is used as a specimen plant, in shrub borders, as flowering hedges, or it can be trained to grow on a trellis. Plant in light to open shade; little flowering will occur in dense shade. Zones 7 to 9.



Arrowwood



Camellias

Coralberry

Coralberry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*), or Indian currant, is a deciduous shrub that grows 3 to 6 feet. It is valued for its clusters of red berries and its ability to grow in dry shady places. Coralberry spreads easily; it is an excellent shrub for use on slopes and banks. Plant in half shade. Zones 3 to 9.

*Cranberry, Mountain

Mountain cranberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea* var. *minus*) is an evergreen shrub that grows 4 to 8 inches. It is valued for its pink to red flowers in May, its evergreen foliage, and its dark-red berries. Mountain cranberry is used chiefly as a ground cover. Plant in moist soil in light to full shade. Zones 3 to 8.



Japanese Holly

Dogwood, Gray

Gray dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*) is a deciduous shrub that grows 6 to 15 feet. It is valued for its white flowers in June and its white berries on pink stems. Gray dogwood is used in shrub borders and as a screen. Plant in light to half shade. Zones 4 to 8.

Fothergilla, Alabama

Alabama fothergilla (*Fothergilla monticola*) is a deciduous shrub that

grows 4 to 6 feet. It is valued for its white flowers in May and its bright yellow and red autumn foliage. Alabama fothergilla is effective when used in foundation plantings, especially in front of evergreens. Plant in moist soil in half shade. Zones 5 to 8.

***Fringetree**

Fringetree (*Chionanthus virginicus*) or white fringe, is a deciduous shrub that grows 15 to 30 feet. It is valued

for its fragrant white flowers in early spring. Fringetree is used chiefly as a specimen plant or as a background in shrub borders. Plant in moist soil in light shade. Zones 4 to 8.

*Holly, Japanese

Japanese holly (*Ilex crenata*) is an evergreen shrub that grows 5 to 15 feet. It is valued for its shiny dark-green foliage and because it withstands

city conditions. Japanese holly is used as a specimen plant, a hedge, or a screen. Light shade is best, but plant will tolerate dense shade. Zones 6 to 9.

Hollygrape, Oregon

Oregon hollygrape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) is an evergreen shrub that grows 3 to 4 feet. It is valued for its yellow flowers in early spring, its shiny foliage that turns bronze red



Oregon Hollygrape

when exposed to winter sun, and its bluish-black grapelike fruits. Oregon hollygrape is used chiefly as a specimen plant. Protect from winds and plant in light to half shade. Zones 5 to 9.

Ivy, English

English ivy (*Hedera helix*) is a creeping, trailing evergreen vine. It is valued because it grows almost anywhere. English ivy is used as a ground cover and for clinging to walls and tree trunks. Plant in any shade. Zones 5 to 10.

Jetbead

Jetbead (*Rhodotypos scandens*) is a deciduous shrub that grows 4 to 6 feet. It is valued for its white flowers in late spring, its bright-green foliage, and its shiny black berries. Jetbead can be used as a specimen plant or in a shrub border. Plant in any soil in light shade. Zones 5 to 9.

***Leucothoë, Drooping**

Drooping leucothoë (*Leucothoë fontanesiana* [*L. catesbaei*]) is an evergreen shrub that grows 4 to 6 feet. It is valued for its white flowers in early spring and for its shiny dark-green foliage, which turns bronze in winter sun. Drooping leucothoë is used in shrub borders or is mixed in with other evergreens. Prune away older branches to keep shrub in vigorous condition. Plant in moist peaty soil in any shade. Zones 5 to 9.

***Mountain-Laurel**

Mountain-laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) is an evergreen shrub that grows 8 to 20 feet. It is valued for its large clusters of pink and white flowers in early summer. Mountain-laurel is used chiefly in woodland plantings and as a foundation planting. Plant in moist acid soil in any shade; flowering is sparse in dense shade. Zones 5 to 9.

Nandina

Nandina (*Nandina domestica*) is an evergreen shrub that grows 6 to 8 feet. It is valued for its large clusters of white flowers in midsummer, its fine-textured foliage, and its red berries in autumn and winter. Nandina is used in shrub borders and as an ornamental in front of taller evergreen plants. Plant in light to open shade. Zones 7 to 9.

Periwinkle

Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*), or myrtle, is an evergreen shrub that grows 12 to 15 inches. It is valued because it is easy to grow almost anywhere. Periwinkle is used chiefly as a ground cover. Plant in any soil and any shade. Zones 5 to 10.

Pittosporum

Japanese pittosporum (*Pittosporum tobira*) is an evergreen shrub that grows 6 to 10 feet. It is valued for its white flowers in late spring and its



Mountain Laurel

shiny dark-green foliage. Japanese pitosporum is used as a specimen plant or as a hedge. Plant in light shade. Zones 8 to 10.

Privet, Glossy

Glossy privet (*Ligustrum lucidum*) is an evergreen shrub that grows 8 to 15 feet. It is valued for its evergreen foliage and ease of care. Glossy privet is used in shrub borders or as a hedge. Plant in light to open shade. Zones 7 to 10.

***Rhododendron, California**

California rhododendron (*Rhododendron macrophyllum*) is an evergreen shrub that grows to 9 feet. It is valued for its pale-rose to purplish flowers in early summer. California rhododendron is not hardy on the east coast but is used in gardens along the Pacific Coast. Plant in light to open shade. Zones 7 to 9.

***Rhododendron, Rosebay**

Rosebay rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*) is an evergreen shrub



Nandina

that grows 15 to 20 feet. It is valued for its white to purplish-pink flowers in June and July, and because it is probably the hardiest evergreen rhododendron. Rosebay rhododendron is used as a screen or as an evergreen background for more ornamental shrubs. Plant in almost any shade. Zones 4 to 8.

***Salal**

Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*), or shallon, is an evergreen shrub that grows to 5 feet. It is valued for its white to pink flowers in early summer and its dark-green leathery foliage. Salal is used in evergreen borders throughout much of the Pacific Coast region.

Plant in moist soil in light to open shade. Zones 6 to 9.

Sarcococca, Fragrant

Fragrant sarcococca (*Sarcococca hookeriana* var. *humilis*) is an evergreen shrub that grows to 1½ feet. It is valued for its glossy foliage. Fragrant sarcococca is used as a tall spreading ground cover, as a foreground for evergreen shrubs, or as a low edging. Plant in almost any shade. Zones 6 to 9.

***Skimmia, Japanese**

Japanese skimmia (*Skimmia japonica*) is an evergreen shrub that grows

2 to 4 feet. It is valued for its bright red berries in autumn and its rich green foliage. Japanese skimmia is used as an evergreen hedge or as a specimen plant. Plant in any shade. Zones 7 to 9.

***Summersweet**

Summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*), or sweet pepperbush, is a deciduous shrub that grows to 9 feet. It is valued for its very fragrant white flowers in late July and because it is easy to grow. Summersweet is used in shrub borders and tends to grow in clumps. Plant in moist soil in any except dense shade. Zones 3 to 9.



Rhododendron

Sweetbay

Sweetbay (*Magnolia virginiana*) is an evergreen shrub or small tree that grows 30 to 50 feet. It is valued for its fragrant white flowers in early summer and for its foliage, which is green above and white below. Sweetbay is used as a background for ornamental evergreens or by itself. In the Deep South, sweetbay is a tree and nearly evergreen, but in New England it is much more shrubby and deciduous. Plant in slightly acid moist soil in open shade. Zones 5 to 10.

*Viburnum, Mapleleaf

Mapleleaf viburnum (*Viburnum acerifolium*) is a deciduous shrub that grows 4 to 5 feet. It is valued for its ability to grow in the shade and its pale-pink color in the fall. Mapleleaf viburnum is used as a specimen or in woodland plantings. Plant in light to full shade. Zones 3 to 9.

Wintercreeper

Wintercreeper (*Euonymus fortunei*) is an evergreen shrub that grows 8 to 10 inches. The variety *colaratus* is valued for its foliage, which turns purple in the winter sun. The variety *gracilis* is valued for its variegated leaves. Wintercreeper is used chiefly as a ground cover. Plant in any shade. Zones 6 to 10.

*Yellowroot

Yellowroot (*Xanthorhiza simplicissima*) is a deciduous shrub that grows 1½ to 2 feet. It is valued for its ability to thrive on moist shady slopes. Yellowroot is used as a tall ground

cover or in borders. Plant in moist soil in light to full shade. Zones 4 to 10.

PREPARING THE SOIL

The benefits of careful soil preparation carry over from year to year. Satisfactory results depend largely on properly prepared soil.

Properly prepared soil—

- Has good drainage.
- Allows shrub roots to grow deep and extensively.
- Provides proper nutrients for growth.

Begin preparing soil several weeks in advance of planting time.

To see if the soil can absorb water, dig a hole about 10 inches deep and fill it with water. If the water drains away within 8 to 10 hours, the soil drains well enough for the shrub to grow.

If water remains in the hole after 10 hours, the drainage is poor and should be improved. If it is not improved, water may begin to collect and rot the roots.

One of the simplest ways to improve drainage is to dig a hole about a foot deeper than that needed to plant the shrub. Fill this deeper part with stones, crushed rock, or gravel.

TESTING FOR ACID SOIL

Most shade-tolerant shrubs grow best in acid soil. To find out if you have acid soil, consult either your county agricultural agent or your local nurseryman. If necessary, get directions for changing the acidity of your soil.

Be sure to tell the person testing your soil, which shrubs you want to grow.

PLANTING AND CARE

The best time to plant most shrubs is in late winter or early spring, before growth begins.

Dig a planting hole wide enough to allow the roots to be spread out and deep enough for the shrub to stand at the same height it stood in the nursery.

After the shrub is set, tamp soil around the roots and water thoroughly.

Mulching.—After planting, cover the soil around the shrub with a mulch—peat moss, pine bark, or wood chips. Mulches help prevent—

- Soil from drying.
- Soil surface from crusting.
- Weeds from growing.

In addition, mulched beds have an orderly look that will beautify your yard.

Apply a layer of mulch 2 or 3 inches deep. For continuing effectiveness, add new mulch regularly.

Weeding.—If you keep a mulch around your shrubs, few weeds will grow. Be careful if you use a hoe or dig around shrubs; the shallow roots of shrubs are easily injured.

Watering.—Watering is essential during the first 2 years after planting. In only a few places is summer rainfall adequate to keep your shrubs growing.

Water your shrubs regularly; more often during dry weather. Use a soaker or sprinkler.

Moisten the entire area around the shrub thoroughly, but do not water so heavily that soil becomes soggy. After watering, let the soil dry out a little before watering again.

Fertilizing.—Shrubs planted in rich soil seldom need fertilizing. Shrubs growing in shade, however, may be competing for nutrients with established trees or other plants. These shrubs require annual fertilizing, preferably in late winter or early spring. Also, you may want to use fertilizers if your shrubs show signs that the soil is not adequate for their specific needs. Signs of low soil fertility are small pale leaves and short twig growth.

Pruning.—Most shrubs grow well without pruning. You may want to prune to remove dead branches, to shape plants, or to reduce their size.

Shrubs that bloom in early spring should be pruned after they flower. Summer-flowering types and those grown for foliage alone should be pruned in early spring. Make pruning cuts back to a bud or a larger branch.

INSECTS AND DISEASES

Most garden supply stores sell general purpose insecticides that aid in controlling insects and diseases.

For information about insects and diseases consult your local nurseryman, county agricultural agent, or State extension horticulturist.



Plant Hardiness Map