

MU Guide

Selecting Landscape Plants: Deciduous Shrubs

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Deciduous shrubs, those that lose their leaves in fall, give seasonal color and texture changes to the landscape. The flowers, foliage, fruit and bark provide color and landscape interest. A properly selected group of shrubs gives interest to the landscape throughout the year.

Deciduous shrubs usually tolerate difficult growing conditions better than most other ornamentals. Many grow rapidly and may require some yearly pruning. Pruning is done just after the shrub flowers, regardless of the time of year. Cutting older, heavier shoots back to ground level is the accepted practice. Remove one-third to one-fourth of the stems each year. For further information on pruning, see MU publication G 6870, *Pruning Ornamental Shrubs*.

Deciduous shrubs have few serious insect or disease problems. Aphids or mites are occasional problems but they are easily controlled.

Some deciduous shrubs are sold bare root. A few must be balled and burlapped or container-grown to be successfully transplanted. Bare-root plants are usually planted in the spring before growth starts. Balled and burlapped and container shrubs may be planted throughout the spring and fall.

Some popular deciduous shrubs

So many deciduous shrubs can be grown in Missouri that describing all of them is impractical. The species and varieties described in the following section are hardy statewide and most commonly grown. Those not reliably hardy throughout the state have been appropriately noted. The expected maximum height of each shrub is shown below the common name.

Dwarf flowering almond (*Prunus glandulosa*) 3 feet

Flowering almond is a small, delicate shrub. Its branches are covered with small flowers in early May. The flowers may be pink or white, single or double. This shrub is a fine specimen plant and makes a nice accent plant for a foundation planting.

Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) 5 feet

Barberry is a rugged plant that adapts to many situations. It has been widely used as a hedge or barrier plant because of its thorny twigs. It is an easy plant to prune and can be clipped into tight hedges.

The small yellow flowers are not especially showy, but the bright red berries are attractive in the fall. Barberry leaves normally have a good red fall color. The variety *atropurpurea*



Japanese spirea (*S. japonica*), a highly variable species native to Japan, Korea and China, is well adapted to Missouri gardens.

has red foliage throughout the growing season. 'Crimson Pygmy', a dwarf red-leaved cultivar, is also available.

Mentor barberry (*Berberis × mentorensis*) 5 feet

An extremely hardy plant, Mentor barberry will adapt to almost any soil. It is a semievergreen shrub that will retain its leaves until midwinter. It has been planted extensively for hedges because of its dense, upright habit of growth and its thorny branches. Little maintenance is required to keep it looking attractive.

Bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*) 8 feet

Bayberry is grown for its aromatic, semievergreen 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, for its foliage as well as its fruit.

Beautyberry (*Callicarpa japonica*) 4 feet

A small shrub with fairly inconspicuous flowers but with uniquely colored purple fruit, borne on the tips of the current season's growth and remaining on the plant a few weeks after the leaves have fallen. Heavy pruning in early

spring will force vigorous growth that results in profuse fruit production. Unfortunately, this shrub has little ornamental value except the colorful berries.

Beauty-bush (*Kolkwitzia amabilis*)
10 feet

A tall, vigorous, upright shrub with an arching branching habit. In May the plant is covered with pink flowers. The brown bristly seeds of Beauty-bush are also interesting. This shrub is easy to grow and requires little attention if it is given enough room to develop.

Chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*)
8 feet

A dependable shrub on almost any soil. Small white to reddish flowers in late May. Chokeberry is planted primarily for the bright red berries that are produced in late summer. There is also a black and purple fruited species available but they are not as attractive as the red one.

Purpleleaf sand cherry (*Prunus x cistena*)
4 feet

A small shrub valued for its purple foliage, which persists throughout the growing season. It produces small, white flowers in May and small, colorful cherries in fall.

Spreading cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster divaricata*)
4 feet

An interesting plant with upright growth habit and arching spreading branches. Red berries cover the branches during early fall, adding considerable interest to the landscape.

Cotoneaster is susceptible to fire blight disease and is occasionally attacked by spider mites.

Rock spray cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster horizontalis*)
3 feet

One of the smaller cotoneasters, Rock spray has semi-evergreen foliage persisting into fall and gradually taking on a reddish color. It also has attractive red berries in the fall. Because of its flat, horizontal growth habit, it is often used in rock gardens or as a groundcover in small areas. Fire blight and spider mites are occasional problems.

Crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*)
10 feet

Although crape myrtle is a very large shrub in the south, it seldom grows taller than 10 feet in Missouri. The plant is grown for its large, showy flowers produced in late summer. Numerous flower colors ranging from white through pink to a dark red are available.

Crape myrtle is somewhat difficult to transplant and so must have a ball of earth around the roots. It is not hardy in the northern parts of Missouri. Some winter protection is needed in all but the southernmost parts of the state. Severely injured plants may fail to bloom even though new growth re-establishes the plant.

Slender deutzia (*Deutzia graeillis*)
3 feet

Deutzias are a group of shrubs grown for the showy white or pinkish flowers produced in May. Slender deutzia is

best because of its small size. It has a slender, graceful arching, growth habit.

Redosier dogwood (*stolonifera*)
6 feet

Redosier is a shrub-type dogwood adaptable to most soils but does best in moist situations. It spreads by underground stems and increases in diameter as new stems arise from the ground. It does not have interesting flowers or fruit but is grown primarily because of its colorful stems. Both red and yellow stemmed varieties are available.

A dwarf type, *C. kelseyi*, seldom grows over 2 feet high and is useful as a groundcover in large areas.

Winged euonymus (*Euonymus alata*)
8 feet

Winged euonymus, a medium-sized shrub, has been used as a hedge because its neat, uniform appearance requires little or no pruning. Twigs of this shrub have corky ridges and are especially interesting in winter after catching a soft snow. This plant has excellent scarlet fall color each year. The compact variety, *E. alata compacta*, grows to only 4 feet tall and is more commonly planted than the standard variety. Euonymus must be transplanted with earth around their roots. Once established, they require little care.

Forsythia (*Forsythia x intermedia*)
6 feet

The profuse yellow flowers of forsythia are considered by many people to be the first sure sign of spring. They are easily grown on almost any soil but prefer full sun. There are many varieties of forsythia available, including some dwarf forms.

Amur honeysuckle (*Lonicera maakii*)
15 feet

WARNING: Highly invasive. Although this plant has attractive flowers and fruit, it should never be planted. The berries are eaten by birds, which spread seeds to shaded natural areas, where the shrub crowds out native understory plants. Eradication is difficult and expensive.

Fragrant honeysuckle (*Lonicera fragrantissima*)
6 feet

This honeysuckle has stiff, leathery, almost evergreen foliage. The white fragrant flowers are borne early in spring. The red berries are produced in late spring but are quickly eaten by birds or covered by the current season's growth of foliage. Honeysuckle is an easily grown plant requiring no special soil or other conditions. It is often used as a hedge. Little pruning is required to maintain an attractive hedge form.

Tatarian honeysuckle (*Lonicera tartarica*)
9 feet

An easily grown shrub with few insect or disease problems. The pink to white flowers are borne in late May. Red berries are attractive in July and August. Honeysuckle is easily transplanted and will grow on almost any soil type.

There are many improved varieties of this plant, but most of them are not widely available. Honeysuckle is useful in a shrub border or as a screening plant.

Hydrangea, Hills of snow (*Hydrangea arborescens grandiflora*)
3 feet

This hydrangea is a small shrub that produces large white flower clusters almost 6 inches in diameter. It is frequently killed back to the ground in winter, but it grows rapidly, and this does not interfere with the flowers.

Hydrangea does not require any special soil but would prefer to have a sunny location for best flower production.

Common lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*)
9 feet

Lilac is one of the best known and most commonly planted of all the flowering shrubs. It is grown primarily for its late spring flowers. Common lilacs, of which there are hundreds of types, are dense, upright-growing shrubs that can be grown almost anywhere. Lilac flowers range in color from white to pink to lilac to bluish to purple. Both single and double flowered forms are commonly available. The flowers of most varieties are very fragrant.

Proper pruning is necessary to keep the plants attractive and to promote heavy flower production. After the plant becomes established, about one-third of the old stems should be removed each year. Older lilac stems may be attacked by borers. Proper pruning helps to minimize this problem.

Persian lilac (*Syringa × persica*)
4 feet

Persian lilac is smaller overall than common lilac. When properly grown, its branches are often covered with flowers. It flowers at about the same time as common lilac.

Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*)
20 feet

A large shrub or small tree planted for its interesting foliage. There are many varieties available but the ones with red leaves and those with finely cut foliage are the most popular. Japanese maple can be grown over most of Missouri, but even the hardiest varieties need some protection in the northern half of the state.

A rich, well-drained soil high in organic matter is needed for best growth. Japanese maple will not grow on poorly drained or dry soils. Although some varieties grow 20 feet tall most of the varieties commonly grown as ornamentals will not get more than 10 feet tall. Most of the varieties are very slow growing.

Mockorange (*Philadelphus spp.*)
7 feet

Mockorange is a vigorous, upright shrub grown primarily for the white flowers, which are borne in late spring. There are many varieties of mock-orange from which to choose. Some varieties produce very fragrant flowers while others are not fragrant. Both single- and double-flowered varieties are available and flower size varies from ½ inch in diameter to almost 2½ inches. Some varieties never get over 4 feet in height while others may grow to 12 feet.

Mockoranges have no serious insect or disease problems. Removal of a few stems from the base each year is all that is required to keep the plants vigorous and free flowering. Unfortunately, they have little ornamental value other than their flowers.

Privet (*Ligustrum spp.*)
8 feet

Privets are automatically considered hedge plants because they have been so widely grown for this purpose. Unsheared specimens produce pyramidal clusters of small white flowers followed by similar clusters of black berries. Fruit remains on the plant most of the winter and provides considerable food for birds.

Privets are vigorous plants that will adapt to most types of soil under most conditions. There are several varieties of privet available. They range from 4 to 12 feet in height. Some of the more popular varieties follow:

Amur — one of the hardiest varieties.

Regel — a low variety with almost horizontal branches.

Golden Vicary — has bright yellow foliage throughout the growing season.

Pussy willow (*Salix spp.*)
20 feet

Pussy willow is grown solely for its interesting and attractive catkins (flowers). The sexes in willow are separate, with the male having the large, gray, fluffy catkins with the bright yellow stamens. The female flower is not nearly as attractive.

The catkins on pussy willow appear in very early spring. It is an easily transplanted, vigorous shrub. However, it has many problems and needs to be kept vigorously growing to look attractive. Pussy willow has been overplanted in many areas.

Flowering quince (*Chaenomeles lagenaria*)
6 feet

Quince shrubs usually have deep red flowers. However, new varieties with white, pink and various shades of red flower colors are now available. Lustrous green foliage appears soon after the flowers have opened. The large yellow-green applelike fruits are not particularly attractive, but can be used to make jellies. The Japanese quince (*C. japonica*), a smaller plant only 3 feet high, is similar to flowering quince.

Rose of Sharon (*Hibiscus syriacus*)
12 feet

A large shrub that flowers in August, at a time when few other shrubs are in bloom. Flowers may be single or double and range in color from white to pink to red to blue and with all variations in between. Unless the older portions of the plant are pruned out regularly, the flowers will become smaller.

If handled properly, the plant is bushy enough to be used as a hedge or screen.

Purple smoke bush (*Cotinus coggygria purpureus*)
15 feet

The purplish plumose fruiting panicles of smoke bush are attractive for several weeks in summer. The foliage is a purplish green throughout the growing season. This shrub is often used as an accent point in the landscape because of the colorful foliage and also the showy fruiting panicles. The yellow to orange autumn color is also attractive. Smoke bush will grow in any soil and any location in the garden. Insects and disease are of little concern.

Spirea
5 feet

(*Spirea* spp.)

Spireas are as easy to grow as any group of flowering shrubs. They adapt to a wide range of soil types. A good deal of sunshine is required for flowering but they will grow in moderate shade. Most spireas have white flowers, but there are a few with red flowers. They range in height from 1½ to 7 feet. Vanhoutte spirea is the best known and still popular because of its heavy set of white flowers and graceful, arching growth habit. Bridal wreath spirea is attractive with its double white flowers, lustrous green foliage and orange fall color. 'Anthony Waterer' is the most popular small spirea, around 3 feet high. The red flowers of this species are borne in large 5- to 6-inch clusters.

There are many recently introduced spireas that grow 2-3 feet tall. 'Gold Flame' has golden spring foliage and pink flowers. 'Snowmound' has a moundlike form with white flowers, and 'Little Princess' forms an 18-inch mound of pink to rose-colored flowers in early summer.

Spireas are relatively free of insect or disease pests. Occasionally in spring a heavy infestation of aphids will require control.

Staghorn sumac
15 feet

(*Rhus typhia*)

Sumacs are easily grown shrubs and do particularly well in a dry soil situation. The staghorn sumac can eventually become a rather large shrub, perhaps 35 feet high; however, it is usually grown as a multiple-stemmed plant and seldom reaches this height. This plant is interesting because there are plants with male flowers only, female flowers only or plants with both male and female flowers. Female flowers develop into bright red fruit spikelets in fall and are quite interesting. The brilliant red fall color of sumac foliage is outstanding. Staghorn sumac has fuzzy twigs from which it derived its common name. This plant can be used as a mass planting, but in modern landscapes it is often used as a specimen because of its interesting growth habit.

Sumacs have no serious insect or disease problems.

Tallhedge
12 feet

(*Rhamnus* × *frangula*) 'Tallhedge'

Tallhedge was developed and is used almost solely as a hedge. It will spread only about 4 feet wide and maintains its shape with little or no pruning. The foliage is a dense, dark, lustrous green. It is an excellent replacement for the often used Lombardy poplar, which has so many problems.

Tallhedge is purchased and planted in spring as a bare root shrub. Larger sizes, balled and burlapped, can be special ordered from nurseries.

Viburnums

(*Viburnum* spp.)

As a group of shrubs, viburnums have more to offer than almost any other single group of plants. In spite of their almost unlimited possibilities, they are infrequently used in most landscapes. They have beautiful spring flowers, attractive summer foliage, excellent fall color and attractive, bright-colored fruits in fall and winter. The fruits

may be red, yellow, blue or black and in a given species may change color several times as they mature. In some species the flowers are quite fragrant, adding materially to their value as ornamental plants. Viburnums are usually sold balled and burlapped or in containers.

A few of the more popular *Viburnum* species follow:

Fragrant viburnum (*V. carlesii*) — a small shrub to 5 feet. The flower buds are pink, opening to white flowers that are quite fragrant. It is susceptible to a graft disease.

Arrowwood viburnum (*V. dentatum*) — a large shrub, 12 to 15 feet. Will grow in sun or shade and is adaptable to any soil. Arrowwood is a rapid grower with good, glossy red fall color.

Wayfaring tree (*V. lantana*) — another large 12- to 15-foot shrub, especially good in a dry soil situation. The fall color is a good red. The fruit changes color from red to black and provides a source of food for birds in winter.

Black haw (*V. prunifolium*) — a large shrub up to 15 feet in height. During May this shrub is covered with white flowers in flat clusters. This is followed with blue-black berries that are among the largest fruits in the viburnums. Black haw has an excellent shining red fall color.

Japanese snowball (*V. tomentosum sterile*) — one of the best viburnums for flowers. Instead of the flower cluster being flat as in most viburnums, the snowball is a large round head of flowers covering the plants. The Japanese snowball should be used in preference to the common European snowball, which is susceptible to attack from aphids.

Maries double-file viburnum (*V. tomentosum mariesii*) — a medium-size shrub up to 9 feet high. During May this plant has creamy white flowers borne in flat clusters followed by bright red berries in fall. The fall color is a dull red but not outstanding. The plant's most interesting feature is its horizontal branching pattern and wide-spreading habit of growth. This interesting growth habit gives the plant added interest in the landscape.

Weigela

(*Weigela* spp.)

Most of the weigelas available in the nursery trade are hybrids developed to produce superior flowers. The funnel-shaped flowers are borne on stems three to five in a cluster. They range in color from white to deep red. The stems are usually covered with flowers for a short period of time in the spring. Weigela is easy to grow and has no serious insect or disease problems.

Winterberry
9 feet

(*Ilex verticillata*)

Winterberry is grown primarily for its bright red berries that appear while the leaves are still green and remain on the plant long after the leaves have fallen. The inconspicuous flowers are borne on separate plants; some plants have all male flowers and others have all female flowers. Only female plants produce the berries, but both sexes need to be present to ensure fruit production. One male plant is enough to pollinate six to eight females. Winterberry will grow on any good garden soil.



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