

Evergreen Shrubs

Daphne 'Aureo-marginata'

Origin. Native to China, Japan and Korea. Introduced to the US in the 1790's.

Garden use. Noted for its exquisite lemony fragrance, which extends for 15–20 feet. Use in borders, foundations, as a specimen, or in groups. Plant near doors, decks or patios for maximum enjoyment, partnered with hellebores and early spring bulbs. It makes a great plant for large containers as long as the pot is protected from freezing. This is the easiest daphne to grow.

Awards. Royal Horticultural Society Award of Garden Merit.

Bloom. Intensely fragrant clusters of reddish-purple flowers with pale pink to white insides in March.

Foliage. Glossy, leathery, dark green leaves (to 4" long) with cream margins.

Habit and vigor. Neat, rounded, dense form. Slow to establish, but then tough and hardy.

Siting. Root systems are stringy and resent transplanting or disturbance once the plant is established, so site carefully. Moving a daphne will usually kill the plant. Does well on slopes, rock gardens or in raised beds. Plants perform well in the dry shade of mature hickory trees.

Culture. Best grown in moist, rich, sandy-humusy, well-drained soils with a neutral pH. Sharp soil drainage is essential. If your soil is clay, use a raised planting. Part shade is best, and plants need afternoon shade here. A light winter mulch is good, but don't let the mulch touch the bark, and don't use an acidifying mulch like pine bark/needles or oak leaves. If using a ground cover, plant one that tolerates dry soil at the same time you plant the shrub to avoid root disturbance later. Established plants in shade need very little spring/summer water, those in part sun need only occasional water. Don't plant daphnes where they will receive irrigation from lawn sprinklers, etc. Similarly, while they look great with ferns, daphnes are best used with other plants that tolerate dry shade.

Problems. Potential diseases include botrytis, leaf spots, canker, twig blight, crown rot, root rot and virus. Potential insect pests include aphids, mealy bugs and scale. Pick a plant that has dark green, glossy leaves that grow horizontally from the stem to avoid getting a diseased specimen. Plants usually live for only 8–10 years, but no garden should be without one!

Gardenia 'Frostproof'

Origin. Gardenias are indigenous to the tropical and subtropical areas of Africa, Asia and Australia.

Garden use. 'Frostproof' is not only more cold hardy than other gardenias, it is also tough, less finicky, and more adaptable to varying soil conditions. The fragrance is still classic. Use near windows or decks to enjoy the fragrance, but be careful near concrete sidewalks and foundations because the soil is often more alkaline in these locations. Try 'Frostproof' in containers or raised beds, as a hedge, espalier, low screen, or specimen.

Awards. Louisiana Super Plant

Bloom. This is one of the earliest-blooming gardenias, with heavy bloom in late spring and sporadic bloom during the summer. The velvety double white flowers have an unusual central cup.

Foliage. Very attractive shiny, narrow green foliage, about half the size of standard gardenia leaves. The nice foliage creates a finer texture than is found in most gardenias.

Habit and vigor. 'Frostproof' forms a compact mound without pruning, and the stems are more pliant than for many gardenias, creating a more graceful look.

Siting. Gardenias prefer morning sun and afternoon shade or filtered shade, preferably with minimum competition from tree roots and protection from winter winds.

Culture. Gardenias prefer a moist, well-drained, acidic soil. Plant high and add lots of organic matter, such as compost or ground bark, to as large an area as possible at planting. Use fertilizer for acid-loving plants. A good time to feed is mid-March, using an acid plant food, fish emulsion or blood meal. Fertilize again in late June to encourage extra flowers or faster growth of young shrubs. Do not fertilize in the fall or you will stimulate tender growth. Gardenias resent root disturbance, so mulch rather than cultivating. Water regularly but don't create "wet feet". Drip irrigating the shrubs will keep water off the foliage and blossoms and prevent leaf spots.

Problems. Control whiteflies, aphids, and other sucking insects with light horticultural oil.

Illicium 'Florida Sunshine'

Origin. *Illicium parviflorum* is native to the Deep South, most often found in moist areas of the Florida panhandle and southern Georgia. 'Florida Sunshine' is thought by some to be a hybrid between *I. parviflorum* and *I. Floridanum* and by others to be a selection of *I. parviflorum*.

Garden use. Use as an accent in a mixed woodland border or as a bright companion to darker-leaved rhododendrons, azaleas and mountain laurels. Looks nice with plum yews and ferns. It is also good for a moist, shady spot in a foundation bed. A mass would be too much, but a single plant is wonderful.

Bloom. Hardly noticeable, not ornamental, unpleasant scent.

Foliage. Foliage is a glossy chartreuse-gold during the spring and summer. As the weather cools in fall, the leaf color brightens to yellow, fading to near parchment by midwinter. During the same time, the upper stems take on a brilliant red cast, contrasting vividly with the leaves. Foliage has a pleasant licorice scent.

Habit and vigor. Upright, rounded shape with open branches, especially in very shady situations.

Siting. The winter foliage will scorch in sun so site this where it will receive year-round.

Culture. Grow 'Florida Sunshine' in a moist, lightly acid, organic-rich soil in in shade to part shade (morning sun only). One year-established shrubs demonstrate better-than-average drought tolerance.

Problems. No serious insect or disease problems.

Sarcococca confusa (sweetbox)

Origin. Introduced to cultivation in 1916 from seed collected in western China.

Garden use. This is the second-hardest sweetbox species and will perform best in protected locations in warmer urban areas. Gardeners in frost pockets or the colder rural parts of the county should use *S. hookeriana* var. *humilis* instead. The dark leaves and fine texture make sweetbox a great foil for silver, gold, or variegated plants. Nice with hostas and heucheras in the shade garden. Use in foundations and borders or as a low hedge or tall ground cover.

Bloom. Honey-scented white flowers in winter or early spring. Glossy fruits in begin red, turning black, and are enjoyed by birds.

Foliage. Glossy, dark green leaves, with a little twist to each leaf that adds texture to the shrub. The foliage is evergreen in mild winters.

Habit and vigor. Habit is loose in youth, becoming densely branched and rounded with age. Sweetbox is slow to become established, often taking several years.

Siting. Sweet box thrives in shade, where its leaf color is deepest green. It tolerates dry conditions once established, making it a good choice for under eaves and in dark, dry locations. Keep it out of hot afternoon sun or the leaves will scorch. Site near a door, path or walk to enjoy the winter fragrance.

Culture. Sweetbox prefers a rich, moist, well-drained soil, but will tolerate clay if the drainage is adequate. It will tolerate dense shade with very dry soil once established. The soil should be kept damp if grown in part shade.

Problems. No serious insect or disease problems. Watch for scale.

Semi-Deciduous Tree

Sweetbay Magnolia

Origin. *Magnolia virginiana* is native to the lowlands and swamps of the Atlantic coastal plain of the east-central and south eastern US.

Garden use. The wonderful fragrance, clean foliage, architectural form, attractive gray bark, rapid growth and cultural adaptability of sweetbay magnolia make it a versatile landscaping plant. Use it by the patio, next to the house, as a specimen, at the edge of wooded areas, or in rain gardens.

Bloom. Cup-shaped, sweetly fragrant (lemony), 9-12 petaled, creamy white, waxy flowers (2-3" diameter) appear in mid-spring and continue sporadically throughout the summer. The scent is not cloying or overbearing as is sometimes true for *M. grandiflora*. Cone-like fruits with bright red seeds mature in fall and can be showy. Fruits are loved by many animals and songbirds.

Foliage. Leaves are thinner, smaller and much more flexible than on *M. grandiflora*, gray-green or green on top and silvery beneath. The leaves move with gentle breezes. Foliage is usually semi-evergreen here, pleasantly spicy in scent, and provide food for swallowtail larvae.

Habit and vigor. Here, expect a 20-30' tall tree with a spreading, rounded crown, or possibly a shorter, suckering, open, multi-stemmed form. In more southern areas it is more tree-like. This is a graceful plant, not stiff like many magnolias.

Siting. In nature, sweetbay generally occurs on acidic, poorly drained soils that are subject to periodic flooding, so it is an ideal plant for low spots, ponds/stream edges, and rain gardens.

Culture. Easily grown in acidic, medium to wet soils in full sun to part shade. Prefers moist, rich, organic soils, but, unlike most other magnolias, tolerates wet, boggy soils. Also does quite well in heavy clay soils.

Problems. No serious insect or disease problems. Susceptible to chlorosis in alkaline soils. It can be damaged by ice storms but will regrow and look fine.

Deciduous Shrubs

Fothergilla 'Mt Airy'

Origin. 'Mount Airy' is a hybrid between two Southeast natives, the mountain species *Fothergilla major* and the coastal plain *Fothergilla gardenii*. It was discovered by plantsman Michael A. Dirr at the Mt. Airy Arboretum in Cincinnati, Ohio and is smaller than *F. major* but larger than *F. gardenii*.

Garden use. 'Mt Airy' is noted for its profuse spring flowering, excellent summer foliage, excellent fall color and consistently upright habit. Group or mass in shrub borders, foundation plantings, or native plantings, or use in a hedge. Mixes nicely with rhododendrons, which generally share the same soil requirements.

Bloom. Terminal, bottlebrush spikes (1-3" long) of honey-scented white flowers bloom in spring after the foliage emerges. While lovely, the flowers are less showy than for *F. gardenii*, which blooms before the foliage. However, the brilliant fall color more than compensates.

Foliage. Leathery, dark green leaves above are bluish gray beneath. Foliage turns excellent shades of yellow, orange and red-purple in fall and is one of the outstanding features – few shrubs can rival the vividness and consistency of the coloration.

Habit and vigor. Vigorous, may spread by root suckers if not promptly removed. However, it looks nice as a mass, so this is not necessarily a liability.

Siting. No special requirements.

Culture. Easily grown in average, medium moisture, well-drained soils in full sun to part shade. Prefers moist, acidic, organically rich soils which have good drainage. Good shade tolerance.

Problems. No serious insect or disease problems. In fact, this is one of those rare "bulletproof" plants that also possess outstanding ornamental qualities.

Spiraea 'Mt Fuji'

Origin. Native to China but grown in Japan for centuries. Introduced here from Japan in about 1863.

Garden use. In addition to its showy, very early flowering and wispy habit, 'Mt Fuji' has variegated leaves for interest throughout the growing season. Use in foundations, borders, or sunny woodland margins, underplanted with spring-flowering bulbs.

Bloom. In late March/early April, before the leaves have unfurled, its slender branches are covered with dazzling white flowers borne in numerous clusters.

Foliage. The feathery, willowy, lime-green, white-variegated leaves emerge chartreuse in spring and create a pleasing contrast to more stolid shrubs. Some of the leaves are twisted and curled, providing additional interest. Leaves turn an outstanding orange in the fall and hold until late in the season.

Habit and vigor. A dense, twiggy, upright, shrub with slender, wiry, outward-arching branches that move with the breeze, creating a uniquely soft textural quality. This is not, however, a 'neat and tidy' plant, and requires some pruning (remove whole branches from the base) to maintain a neat silhouette and to prevent it from becoming somewhat open and leggy.

Siting. No special requirements.

Culture. Easily grown in average, medium moisture, well-drained soils in full sun. Tolerates light shade, a wide range of soils and some drought. Prune a few older stems to the ground immediately after flowering to maintain shape.

Problems. No serious insect or disease problems. Susceptible to many of the diseases and insects that attack other rose family members, including leaf spot, fire blight, powdery mildew, root rot, aphids, leaf roller and scale.

Vitex 'Shoal Creek'

Origin. The species is native to China but has been grown in Japan for centuries, and was introduced here from Japan in about 1863.

Garden use. Interesting foliage and late summer flowers. This cultivar was selected for its vigorous growth, large flower spikes produced over an extended season, and superior blue-purple flower color. Use in large shrub borders, foundations, cottage gardens or butterfly gardens. Vitex shines in late summer when the rest of the garden can look tired and devoid of bloom.

Awards. Texas Superstar Shrub, Louisiana Super Plant

Bloom. Tiny, fragrant lilac flowers appear in loose panicles (to 12" long) throughout the summer. Flowers are quite attractive to butterflies and bees.

Foliage. Foliage is aromatic, with star-shaped gray-green leaves, silvery below, each leaflet to 6" long. Leaves flutter attractively in the breeze, creating a two-tone effect. Some spring interest is provided by the new branch growth, which is showy purple, turning red-brown then pale gray as the branch matures. One downside is that plants leaf out late in spring. This may be why most garden centers don't carry them.

Habit and vigor. A vase-shaped, multi-stemmed large shrub/small tree, but can be trained to a single-trunk. The canopy is symmetrical and rounded. Plants are vigorous, fast growers.

Siting. Avoid planting in a low spot where water could stand for any period of time.

Culture. Best grown in loose, medium moisture, fertile, loamy, well-drained soil in full sun. Regular moisture is needed during establishment, but vitex will not tolerate constantly wet soil. Once established, 'Shoal Creek' will tolerate short dry spells but should be given extra water during drought.

Problems. No serious insect or disease problems. Leaf spot and root rot are occasional problems. Keeping the root zone free of debris and keeping foliage dry by watering only at the root zone usually are all that is needed to prevent these problems.