

LOW MAINTENANCE VIBURNUMS CREATE COLORFUL ENVIRONMENT

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Viburnum composes an outstanding group of low-maintenance shrubs that are under-used. Every landscape would be enhanced by the addition of a few. Each species is quite different, but contains a thread of commonality. Similar landscape characteristics include flowers, fruit, and outstanding fall color. The flowers are borne terminally, usually white or creamy-white in color. The fruit are in single drupes, ranging in color from red to yellow, blue, and blue-black. Often Viburnum fruit is edible and serves as a secondary source of food for birds. The fall foliage color is another characteristic which can't be over-emphasized. It ranges through red, scarlet, yellow, and purple. Viburnum should be broken into two groups—native and imports from Europe and Asia. The native Viburnum include *Viburnum acerifolium*, *V. dentatum*, *V. lantana*, *V. lentago*, *V. prunifolium*, and *V. trilobum*.

Mapleleaf Viburnum (*V. acerifolium*) is native from Minnesota in the north to North Carolina in the south. It is a rounded shrub, 4 to 6 feet in height and 3 to 4 feet in width at maturity. *V. acerifolium* will grow as an understory shrub or will persist in sun, but thrives in shade. Mapleleaf Viburnum grows best in a sandy, well-drained soil but will stand a fairly high water table. Its landscape effectiveness is in native plantations, e.g., screens, border, or mass plantings. Pruning should be done at the base to encourage additional stems, but little pruning is needed. The small, maple-shaped leaf is a bright green throughout the summer, becoming a reddish-purple in the fall. Flowers are very effective during late May through early June, being 1 to 1½ inches in diameter and creamy-white in color. The fruit is ¼ inch in diameter and bluish-black when ripe (during mid-September). Insect and disease problems are almost nonexistent. Mapleleaf Viburnum requires the least maintenance of all the Viburnums.

Arrowwood Viburnum (*V. dentatum*) is a 5 to 9-foot upright oval shrub with a spread of 6 feet at maturity.

This plant suckers readily; thus frequent spring basal pruning will help contain this woody native. *V. dentatum* thrives in partial to full sun. Optimal soil is a well-drained, sandy loam. Flowers are effective for ten to twelve days during late May. The 2 to 4-inch terminal creamy-white flowers can be outstanding in an intimate garden situation. The leaves are small (1 to 3 inches long), oval, and coarsely dentate. Summer foliage is a clear yellow-green with fall color varying from nonexistent to scarlet-yellow or purplish-red. Often the entire range of fall color can be seen on the same plant. Arrowwood is one plant that should be selected for fall color. The bluish fruit is effective through September and October or until the birds have eaten it. Its landscape value is obvious as a hedge.



Blackhaw viburnum leaves (left) are a clear dark green in the summer and scarlet to purple in the autumn.

American Cranberrybush viburnum (above) displays white flowers, up to four-inch cluster, in May.



screen, or in native plantations in the understory plant rather than sunny-open situations.

Wayfaringtree Viburnum (*V. lantana*) is a naturalized native of Europe. It is a multiple-stemmed shrub or a rounded tree, 10 to 14 feet in height, with a spread of 10 feet. Summer leaves are coarse texture while being dull green in color. Fall color in the mid-West is nonexistent or a dull maroon. *V. lantana* flowers during early May. The 3 to 5-inch terminal cream-white flowers create an exciting addition. Fruit is 1/3 inch in diameter and ranges in color from yellow to red and finally black at maturity. As a landscape feature, fruit is considerably more effective and colorful during summer than at maturity. This multiple-stemmed shrub should be planted in full sun or partial shade. It thrives in high organic, well-drained soils. Pruning is a task which should be considered every two to three years. Basal spring pruning, which is similar to the treatment of forsythia or lilac, removes the oldest canes first, renews the shrub, and keeps it from becoming too dense. In commercial landscapes, it is effective as a specimen or in mass plantings.

Nannyberry Viburnum (*V. lentago*) is an outstanding specimen shrub or small tree. It has an upright oval habit of growth, reaching 15 to 18 feet in height and 6 to 8 feet in width at maturity. Wyman has reported speci-

mens of *V. lentago* reaching 25 feet in height. This plant prefers to be grown in full sun with well-drained soils. Specimens grown in partial sun or shade often get mildew. The 3 to 8-inch creamy-white flowers are effective mid through late May. The 1/2-inch drupe of blue-black fruit are an interesting addition while being quite effective during September. The summer foliage is a glossy yellow-green, becoming a dependable purple or scarlet in the fall. The 2 to 4-inch long leaves give a somewhat medium texture. In the landscape, individual specimens, shrubs, or trees can be particularly effective, while in large area landscapes, mass plantings have been desirable.

Blackhaw Viburnum (*V. prunifolium*) is indeed an outstanding native Viburnum. It can be grown in full sun or partial shade. This oval shrub or specimen tree reaches 15 feet in height and 8 to 12 feet in width. It flowers about mid-May. The creamy-white, 2 to 4-inch terminally borne flowers contrast well against the summer foliage. The leaf is a clear dark green during the summer with fall color ranging from scarlet to purplish-red. In fact, the fall color of Blackhaw is outstanding and dependable. The fruit is equally exciting. It ranges from yellow to pink and finally blue at maturity. Blackhaw is edible, having been used by early settlers in jellies and jams. Although *V. prunifolium* prefers well-drained soil, it will tolerate heavy clays as well. Blackhaw is extremely low maintenance, requiring little or no pruning. It can be equally enjoyed as a specimen or in mass plantings for the home or commercial landscape. Insect and disease problems don't exist. *V. prunifolium* is the aristocrat of native Viburnums.

American Cranberrybush Viburnum (*V. trilobum*) is a regal native. Its habit is an upright oval, reaching 8 to 12 feet in height with a 5 to 8-foot spread. It is considerably more effective than European Cranberrybush Viburnum (*V. opulus*). *V. trilobum* suckers freely, thus annual pruning is important. This annual spring basal pruning is again similar to treatment of lilacs, removing old diseased canes, reducing the overall height, and, of course, improving the vigor of the plant. The white flowers are 3 to 4 inches in diameter and extremely effective during mid-May. The large reddish fruit often hold on and are effective from September through February. Foliage is rich green throughout the summer, becoming scarlet in the fall. American Cranberrybush should be planted in full sun but will tolerate light shade. It is effective as a specimen, shrub, and screen planting. American Cranberrybush is considerably more effective with fruit and fall color than is *V. opulus*, but it is more difficult to obtain in the trade. It should be propagated and used more often as it has a more narrow upright habit, is cleaner in appearance, and certainly has outstanding fall color.

These native Viburnums have few insect and disease problems, require minimal pruning, and fit in almost any landscape, resulting in a natural-woody feeling. Good companion trees for many of these Viburnum include Scarlet Oak, Red Oak, White Ash, Green Ash, Red Maple, Sugar Maple, Silver Maple, Paper Birch, and American Beech.

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