

Shrubs

by Ginette Valin

Shrubs are the most important elements in your garden. They require very little care and even the most inexperienced gardener can succeed with them. You plant them, water them a bit in the first year and off they go!

In fact, shrubs are easier to grow than annuals, perennials, bulbs and grasses and although most prefer sun, many will manage in a shady spot. Chances are a shrub you plant today will still be there when your great great grandchildren inherit your house from your grandchildren.

Shrubs reduce air pollution. Their ability to absorb pollutants and dust is unbelievable. Surround a city house with shrubs and the air around it becomes as healthy as a country home.

They prevent erosion. They interrupt raindrops, thereby reducing the impact on the soil and their long roots prevent soil erosion.

They enrich the soil. Shrubs return to the soil any elements they use to grow by dropping flower petals and leaves. They require very little fertilizer.

They act as wind break and sun screen.

When you consider adding shrubs to your landscape, why not chose some that offer year round interest. Why go for a beautiful 2-week blooming period if the shrub looks pitiful for the other 50 weeks. Try to chose shrubs that have attractive features every season. Some have spectacular flowering and nothing else for the rest of the summer. That's not so bad but others have beautiful flowers in the spring, wonderful foliage in the summer, berries or colourful leaves in the fall and outstanding bark in the winter. Now, that's much better! Some bear silvery foliage or intricate leaves and though they offer no flowering, they are still beautiful all year.

Many shrubs adapt to various conditions and are truly resistant to insects and diseases. Their growth is continuous, they are seldom invasive and often require no pruning.

Shrubs should be considered a permanent structure in your landscape. In reality, perennials and annuals are just temporary fillers, until the shrub takes up that spot. Their location should therefore be carefully chosen. When choosing shrubs, the way to go about it is not to go to the nursery, fill up a cart with interesting shrubs and return home where you'll improvise as to where you'll put them. You would risk buying plants not proper to your conditions or needs, not to mention that if wrongly located, they could cause problems.

Try to visualize what they will look like fully grown. Choose shrubs that are tried and true. Imagine large areas of the same colour, thus avoiding the pizza effect. Repeat the colour at least once -- that truly is the secret of creating harmony in your landscape. And, for instance, if you fear your flaming red rose bush might clash with your yellow potentilla a little further away, add a silvery foliage shrub in the middle or one with white flowers.

Here are a few choice shrubs that offer interesting features at least 3 seasons a year, sometimes 4. Some have a different feature each season, others have only one characteristic that lasts all year, like the Wintercreeper Euonymus (*Euonymus fortunei*) with its attractive evergreen foliage:

Serviceberry, Japanese Aralia, Pagoda Dogwood, Grey Dogwood, Japanese Kerria, Oregon Grape, Common Elder, American Highbush Cranberry.