

Great Shrubs for the Pacific Northwest

Shrubs are the backbone of all good gardens. Well-chosen shrubs provide many years of low-maintenance enjoyment, while poorly-chosen shrubs provide years of endless work. For those of us fortunate enough to garden in the Pacific Northwest, many plants fall within the 'great shrub' category. So many, in fact, it is often difficult to choose between them!

In an effort to help our readers determine what shrubs to plant, we've created the following list of recommended shrubs. Our selection criteria: hardy for USDA zones 7 and 8, good disease/pest resistance, requires little maintenance/pruning, not overly aggressive or invasive, attractive, compatible with our soil types, and provides year-round interest. As always, remember to plant these shrubs according to their cultural requirements (soil, water, sun/shade, mature size).

Large Specimen Shrubs

These plants make great, stand-alone focal points.

Callicarpa bodinieri v. *giraldi* 'Profusion' (Beautyberry)

Deciduous, purple berries in winter, graceful arching branches, sun to part shade, 6-8 ft. tall x 6 ft. wide

Chamaecyparis

obtusa (Hinoki False Cypress)

Evergreen, many varieties, dwarf shrubs to trees, sun to part shade

pisifera 'Boulevard' (Boulevard Cypress)

Evergreen, silvery blue/green foliage, sun to part shade, slow growing to 8 ft. tall/wide

Corylopsis pauciflora (Buttercup Winter Hazel)

Deciduous, short chains of yellow flowers in late winter on bare branches, full sun to part shade, 4-6 ft. tall x 5-8 ft. wide

Cotinus

coggygia 'Royal Purple' (Purple Smoke Tree)

Deciduous, full sun, drought tolerant, dark purple leaves, 10-15 ft. tall/wide

'Grace' (Grace Smoke Tree)

Deciduous, full sun, drought tolerant, red leaves, good fall color, pink puffy flowers, 10-15 ft. tall/wide

Elaeagnus pungens 'Maculata' (Silverberry)

Evergreen leaves with yellow centers, drought tolerant, full sun to part shade, fast growing mounding shrub to 15 ft. tall/wide

Enkianthus campanulatus 'Red Bells' (Red Bells Enkianthus)

Deciduous, bell-shaped flowers in late spring, good fall color, great structure, sun to part shade, slow growing to 8 ft. tall/wide

Fatsia japonica (Japanese Aralia)

Evergreen, large tropical-looking leaves, shade, mounding multi-stemmed shrub, 5-8 ft. tall/wide

Hamamelis (Witch Hazel)

Deciduous, winter flowers on bare branches, excellent fall color, sun to part sun, vase-shaped shrub, 8-12 ft. tall/wide

intermedia 'Diane' – dark red/orange flowers, drought tolerant

intermedia 'Jelena' – coppery orange flowers

intermedia 'Pallida' – light yellow flowers

intermedia 'Winter Beauty' – fragrant, golden-yellow flowers

mollis (Chinese Witch Hazel) – most fragrant, golden-yellow flowers

Hydrangea quercifolia 'Snow Queen' (Oakleaf Hydrangea)

Deciduous, great fall color, elongated white flower clusters in summer fade to rose/pink, large oak-shaped leaves, sun to part shade, 5 ft. tall x 6 ft. wide

Mahonia x media 'Charity' (Charity Mahonia)

Evergreen, frond-like leaves, yellow winter flowers, summer fruit, part shade, 15 ft. tall x 12 ft. wide

Myrica californica (California Wax Myrtle)

Evergreen, great screening shrub, berry-like fruit, sun, can be sheared for hedge, 8-10 ft. tall/wide

Physocarpus opulifolius 'Diablo' (Purple Leaf Ninebark)

Deciduous, dark purple leaves, can be cut to ground in winter to control size, sun for best color, 9 ft. tall x 10 ft. wide

Ribes sanguineum (Flowering Currant)

Deciduous, native plant, spring flowering, fruiting, 5-10 ft. tall/wide

'King Edward VII' – pink/red flowers, drought tolerant once established

' White Icicle' – white flowers, drought tolerant once established

Rosa glauca (Blueleaf Rose)

Deciduous, grown for grey/green/purple foliage more than small pink flowers, scarlet rose hips in fall, sun, 6 ft. tall x 5 ft. wide

Viburnum

bodnantense 'Dawn' (Pink Dawn Viburnum)

Deciduous, fragrant pink flowers fall to spring on bare branches, vase-shaped shrub, sun, 8-10 ft. tall x 6-8 ft. wide

plicatum tomentosum 'Mariesii' (Marie Doublefile Viburnum)

Deciduous, white lace-cap spring flowers in horizontal layers, sun to part shade, 6-8 ft. tall x 8-10 ft. wide

burkwoodii (Burkwood Viburnum)

Deciduous, fragrant pink flowers early spring, dark green leaves with white undersides, good fall color, sun to part shade, several varieties, to 12 ft. tall x 8 ft. wide

Smaller Shrubs

These shrubs are outstanding when planted in groups of three, five, or more. They are dependable backbone plants in any garden; plant both evergreen and deciduous varieties for year-round interest.

Arctostaphylos uva-ursi (Bearberry, Kinnikinnick)

Evergreen ground cover, many varieties, native plant, sun to part shade, 1 ft. tall to 15 ft. wide

Berberis thunbergii (Japanese Barberry)

Deciduous, thorn-covered branches, grown for foliage color, sun

'Aurea' – golden-yellow leaves, slow growing to 3 ft. tall/wide

'Crimson Pygmy' – red leaves, dwarf form, slow growing to 2 ft. tall/wide

'Rose Glow' – marbled red/bronze leaves, good in mass, 4-6 ft. tall/wide

Chamaecyparis pisifera 'Golden Mops' (Golden Mops False Cypress)

Evergreen, golden foliage, sun to part shade, low mounding shrub to 2 ft. tall/wide

Fothergilla gardenii (Dwarf Fothergilla)

Deciduous, white bottlebrush spring blooms, great fall colors, sun to part shade, medium-growing to 4-5 ft. tall/wide

Ilex crenata (Japanese Holly)

Evergreen, many varieties, looks like boxwood, drought tolerant, one of the best backbone garden shrubs, can be cut for formal hedges, sun to part shade, usually 4-10 ft. tall/wide, some dwarf varieties available

Juniperus

conferta (Shore Juniper)

Evergreen ground cover, low trailing branches, blue/green needles, sun to part shade, 1 ft. tall x 6-8 ft. wide

squamata 'Blue Star' (Blue Star Juniper)

Evergreen, mounding, silver blue foliage, sun to part shade, slow growing to 2-3 ft. tall x 3-4 ft. wide

Kalmia latifolia (Mountain Laurel)

Evergreen, spring flowers, many varieties, partial shade, slow growing to 6-8 ft. tall/wide (dwarf varieties to 3 ft.)

Mahonia

aquifolium (Oregon Grape)

Evergreen, native plant, spreads by roots, sun to shade, to 6 ft. tall/wide

nervosa (Longleaf Mahonia, Cascade Oregon Grape)

Evergreen, one of the best native shrubs, multi-leave stems, spreads by roots, yellow flowers, sun to shade, drought tolerant, 2 ft. tall x 4 ft. wide

Osmanthus delavayi (Delavay's Osmanthus)

Evergreen, graceful arching branches, fragrant white spring flowers, sun to part shade, rounded shrub to 10 ft. if not pruned, good hedge plant

Picea abies 'Nidiformis' (Bird's Nest Spruce)

Evergreen, dwarf type of Norway Spruce, mounding, sun to light shade, dense growth to 3-5 ft. tall x 4-6 ft. wide

Pieris japonica (Andromeda, Lily-of-the-valley Shrub)

Evergreen, many varieties, late winter flowers in drooping clusters, sun to part shade, average size 5-6 ft. tall/wide

Rhododendron

'Ken Janeck'

Evergreen, compact form, pink flowers, part shade, 3 ft. tall/wide

'The Hon. Jean Marie de Montague'

Evergreen, red flowers, dark green leaves, sun to part shade, 5 ft. tall/wide

'PJM'

Evergreen, root weevil resistant, purplish foliage, early pink flowers, part shade, 4 ft. tall/wide

'Snowbird' (azalea)

Deciduous, white/pink fragrant flowers, blue/green leaves, good fall color, part shade, 4 ft. tall/wide

Sarcococca hookeriana humilis (Dwarf Sweet Box)

Evergreen ground cover, shade, spreads slowly by underground runners, fragrant white flowers, 1 ft. tall x 3 ft. wide

Thuja

occidentalis 'Emerald Green' (Emerald Green Arborvitae)

Evergreen, pyramidal form, dense-growing shrub, sun, 10-15 ft tall x 3-4 ft. wide

occidentalis 'Rheingold' (Rheingold Arborvitae)

Evergreen, golden foliage, cone-shaped mound, sun, slow growing to 6 ft. tall/wide

viburnum

davidii (David's Viburnum)

Evergreen, leathery dark green oval leaves, spring flowers, fruiting, sun to part shade, compact mound to 4 ft. tall/wide

tinus 'Spring Bouquet' (Spring Bouquet Laurustinus)

Evergreen, blooms fall to spring, fruiting, good hedge plant, sun to part shade, 6 ft. tall/wide

Many of these shrubs are listed on the [Great Plant Picks](#) website. The 'Great Plant Picks' program was created to help Pacific Northwest gardeners identify outstanding plants; it is administered by the Elizabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden in Seattle, Washington. Visit this website for a complete list of trees, shrubs, vines, perennials, and bulbs; including photos and detailed plant information.

Resources

Elizabeth C. Miller Botanical Gardens, Administrator. (2003 –last update). [Great Plant Picks](#). [February 18, 2003]

Kathleen Norris, ed. *Sunset Western Garden Book*, 7th ed., Menlo Park, CA: Sunset Publishing Corporation, 2001.

Barrick, William E., *American Horticultural Society 75 Great American Garden Plants*, Birmingham, Alabama: Oxmoor House, 1998.