

### **Addendum: Additional Details and Answers to Chat Questions**

*Elaine Mills, presenter of "Overused Foundation Plants & Native Alternatives"*

A question arose in the **edibility for humans of fruit** for the native shrubs discussed.

- The berries of Black Chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*) can be eaten raw, although they have a bitter, astringent taste. They can also be used in baked goods or as a flavoring for yogurt or ice cream. The fruit is especially high in beneficial anthocyanins.
- The berries of Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) can be dried and used as a savory, peppery seasoning.
- Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*), another native shrub which I did not mention, has sweet edible fruit. The blossoms can be used to make syrup, beverages, or fritters.
- I have learned that the fruit of Possum-haw (*Viburnum nudum*) is edible and was eaten by the Abnaki and Algonquian Indians. The berries are highly acidic. Black Haw (*Viburnum prunifolium*) berries are reportedly edible raw when ripe or cooked in jams or preserves. Some foragers use the somewhat sour fruit of Arrow-wood (*Viburnum dentatum*) as a nibble while hiking, although the berries have only a thin layer of edible flesh. In general, the native viburnums have large seeds and relatively little pulp.

Several attendees asked about **native shrubs that are evergreen**.

- The only one described in detail in the presentation is Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*), a native holly, which might be a good substitute for non-native boxwood.
- Two evergreen shrubs that I mentioned briefly are Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) and Rosebay Rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*).
- The 'Maryland Dwarf' cultivar of the American Holly tree (*Ilex opaca*) is another possibility. It forms a low, wide mound 2 to 3 feet high with dark green, minimally spiny leaves and some fruit production.
- Other evergreen shrubs include Coastal Doghobble (*Leucothoe axillaris*), Southern Bayberry (*Morella (Myrica) cerifera*), Northern Bayberry (*Morella (Myrica) pensylvanica*), and Yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*), although their native range in Virginia is further south and east of the Northern Virginia region. Yaupon holly has many cultivars, including some that are weeping, or dwarf.

There was an inquiry about **tall, narrow native shrubs**.

- I mentioned Red Chokeberry, but didn't give its scientific name which is *Aronia arbutifolia*. It measures 6 to 8 feet in height and 3 to 4 feet in width.
- The 'Will Fleming' cultivar of Yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*) has a narrow, columnar form. It reaches 8 to 15 feet in height, but is only 1 to 2 feet wide.

Notes on other **specific plants**:

- Although at first glance the leaves of **Fragrant Sumac** (*Rhus aromatica*), including the 'Gro-Low' cultivar, resemble those of poison ivy (*Rhus toxicodendron*), they are not poisonous and do not cause skin irritation.
- **'Low Scape Mound'** is the cultivar of Black Chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*) that was briefly mentioned for use as a ground cover or edging plant. It could also fill the role of a spiller in a container. This diminutive shrub grows in full to part-sun and is heat- and drought-tolerant. It reaches 1 to 2 feet at maturity and has the same features of the straight species: white spring flowers, dark summer fruit, and brilliant fall foliage.
- Dwarf forms of **Oakleaf Hydrangea** (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) are also available.
- A few modern hybrids of **Wild Hydrangea** (*Hydrangea arborescens*) have been bred to have pink flowers. Unlike most other hydrangeas, the flower color is not affected by soil pH.
- The **native Northern Bush Honeysuckle** pictured in one of the home landscapes is *Diervilla lonicera*. Like the non-native species it has yellow tubular flowers through the summer months. Its nectar is sweet, but it doesn't have a noticeable fragrance. The flowers are self-infertile, so two to three plants are recommended for reliable fruiting. It grows 2 to 3 feet in height. In Virginia, its native range is limited to the mountains.
- A participant mentioned "**false indigo.**" I didn't include this plant, also known as Blue False Indigo or Blue Wild Indigo (*Baptisia australis*), in the presentation since it is a perennial rather than a woody shrub. Because of its mature size (3 to 4 feet) and shrub-like growth habit, it could be used in a foundation planting. It will die back completely to the ground each year, of course, rather than remaining as an architectural presence over the winter months.

One participant requested an explanation of my notes indicating that many of the shrubs "provide **wildlife support.**" In responding, I explained that support could be provided for pollinators, adult Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths), and hummingbirds through the nectar and pollen of flowers. Certain species serve as host plants when their foliage is consumed by the caterpillar stage of butterflies and moths. Fruit of native shrubs is enjoyed by many bird species and other small animals. I should also have mentioned that the shrubs themselves can provide sheltered places for birds to rest and nest, especially when they are planted in clusters to create habitat. Excellent examples are the Arrow-wood and Possum-haw viburnums, Black Chokeberry, American Beauty-berry, Highbush Blueberry, and the Winterberry and Inkberry hollies.

If you are concerned about **planting in compacted soil**, our Agent Kirsten Conrad advises to amend the entire bed rather than just the planting hole for a new shrub. Amending a planting hole will guarantee problems if you have a base soil that is clay or sand. Practice soil improvement practices on a large scale. (See further information on building soil in our video on "Climate-Conscious Gardening" beginning at 21:11.)

Regarding **removal of invasives**:

- If possible, it is best to remove invasive shrubs by manual means, such as pulling or digging. You want to make certain that you have removed the entire root to prevent resprouting. This usually works best with small or young plants, in loose soil, or when soil is damp. The plants should be disposed of in the trash rather than with other organic waste to prevent the spread of seeds and small root parts.
- In his new book, *Nature's Best Hope*, entomologist Dr. Doug Tallamy strongly advocates against the use of herbicides. He admits that he has used them very rarely and in a carefully controlled manner only after he has attempted removal of persistent invasive shrubs over a period of several years.
- In speaking about one characteristic of invasive plants I misspoke and described them as "allopathic." The text on the slide is correct; the word should be "allelopathic."

A reminder about resources from Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia:

- There are three sets of helpful **fact sheets** under the "Plants" menu option on our website at <https://mgnv.org/>
- There are fact sheets for most of the shrubs I described that are native to the Mid-Atlantic region.
- The section of fact sheets on **ground covers** may be of special interest as it recommends native species that could serve as "green mulch," replacing invasive English Ivy, Liriope, Periwinkle, Japanese Pachysandra, and Wintercreeper.
- Information on plants suited to wet or dry conditions is provided on "Best Bets" fact sheets.
- Additional educational information on native plants can be found in the **Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter** posts by Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia. I have weekly (Tuesday) Facebook and daily Instagram and Twitter posts which invite viewers to identify native "mystery plants" and then learn if their guesses were correct.

There was a question regarding the specific **soil pH requirements** for certain shrubs, and I mistakenly reported that this information is provided on our fact sheets in the Tried & True Native Plants for the Mid-Atlantic on the MGNV website. We don't give specific pH levels, but do indicate whether the soil should be acidic, as for the hollies, for example. The index at the back of the "Guide to Native Plants for Northern Virginia" on the Plant NOVA Natives website gives the specific pH range for most of their listed native shrubs. See <https://www.plantnovanatives.org/quick-start-guide>

For those interested in information on **climate-conscious gardening** techniques, see our video on the topic. It features sections on low-emission practices & products (10:25), wise use of water (15:13), building soil (21:11), rethinking lawns (27:39), and making informed choices of plants (44:02). A list of recommended books and other resources on the subject and a helpful checklist are provided immediately below the recording.