

*Elaine Mills, presenter of Native Trees & Shrubs for Pollinators*

In response to a question about any **native evergreen shrubs**, 5' x 5', with colorful flowers for pollinators:

- The following native shrubs are evergreen, but they may not meet all of the criteria mentioned. Colorful flowers are pleasing for gardeners, but they aren't necessarily the only ones that attract pollinators. Some plants are dioecious and will require at least one plant of each sex for cross-pollination and fruiting.
- Note soil pH preferences; many of these shrubs require acidic soil. Remember the principle of "Right Plant, Right Place" and [conduct a soil test](#) to confirm the proper conditions for the proposed planting location.
- Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*): 6-10', small white flowers on separate male and female plants, sun to part shade, moist to wet, pH 4.5-6.0
- 'Grey Owl' Redcedar – (*Juniperus virginiana* 'Grey Owl'): spreading, 2-3' x 4-6', non-flowering, sun, moist, pH 5.0-8.0
- Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*): 5-20', showy flowers, part shade, dry to wet, pH 4.5-6.0
- Coastal Doghobble (*Leucothoe axillaris*): 2-4', clusters of small heather-like flowers, part shade, moist, pH 4.5-6.0
- Southern Bayberry (*Morella cerifera*): 10-15', drab flowers on separate male and female plants, sun to part shade, dry to wet, pH 4.5-7.0
- Great Rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*): 5-15', large showy flower clusters, part- to full shade, moist, pH 4.5-6.0

In regard to **cultivars of serviceberry**:

- There are many species of Serviceberry (*Amelanchier* genus) in North America, seven of which are listed as native in Virginia.
- *Amelanchier x grandiflora* is a natural hybrid cross of *Amelanchier arborea* (Downy Serviceberry) and *A. laevis* (Smooth Serviceberry).
- The hybrid has many named cultivars selected for brilliant fall color and abundant blooms, including 'Autumn Brilliance', 'Autumn Sunset', 'Ballerina,' and 'Princess Diana'.
- Most online sources cite the aesthetic appeal of these cultivars or the attraction of birds to the fruit, but do not mention the value to pollinators.
- I usually opt for the straight species of a plant to be certain that the value of nectar and pollen has not been modified when other plant characteristics were manipulated.

Downy Serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea*) mentioned in the presentation and other Rose Family members such as crabapples (*Malus* genus), pears (*Pyrus*) and quince (*Chaenomeles*), can suffer from **cedar-apple rust** when planted near either Eastern Redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) or prostrate junipers.

- The disease requires both hosts to be present within a mile of each other.
- The results of the disease are cosmetic, making the fruit unsightly and inedible, rather than life-threatening.
- For more information on the disease, see [“Cedar Apple and Related Rusts on Ornamentals”](#) from Penn State Extension.
- The regime for preventing rust diseases is quite arduous and is not recommended by our Extension agent. See the recording of her class on [“Fruit Producing Trees: Insect and Disease Management Strategies”](#) for more information.

Regarding **susceptibility of native Viburnums to Viburnum Leaf Beetle**:

- A [fact sheet from Maryland Cooperative Extension](#) provides detailed information on this invasive insect pest, the damage it causes, and various controls.
- See a [fact sheet from Cornell University](#) that ranks susceptibility of various species. According to that resource, Black Haw is among the native species that is somewhat less susceptible.

In response to a question about **short cultivars of Mountain Laurel** (*Kalmia latifolia*):

- According to the Missouri Botanical Garden website, ‘Elf’ is a dwarf cultivar that typically grows 2 to 3 feet tall and wide, but which spreads to 4 feet as it matures.
- The same source describes ‘Minuet’ as a dwarf shrub that typically matures to 3 feet tall and wide.

Regarding **toxicity of Elderberry** (*Sambucus canadensis*):

- The Plants for a Future website states that the leaves and stems are poisonous, and the unripe fruit has been known to cause stomach upset due to the presence of an alkaloid and cyanogenic glycosides. It further indicates that “any toxin the fruit might contain is liable to be of very low toxicity and is destroyed when the fruit is cooked.” Check the [website](#) for citations.
- If there any concerns that family members might accidentally consume the raw fruit, it would probably be best to avoid this plant in the home landscape.

- A helpful resource on the **toxicity of plants** is the [North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox](#). Enter the plant name in the search box and scroll to check the final field among the categories of information provided for each species.

With regard to differences between the **native and European elderberry**:

- The American Elderberry has a compact, bush-like habit and grows 6 to 12 feet tall. Its herbaceous green stems turn woody at the bottom and develop brown bark with tiny furrows. The European species grows 20 to 30 feet tall and has a tree-like habit.
- The native species blooms earlier (April instead of May or June). The individual flowers are creamy white, measure just under an inch, and are arranged in clusters spanning 4 to 12 inches across. The flowers of the non-native plant are yellowish-white, measure 1/8 of an inch or less, and are grouped in clusters about 6 to 8 inches wide.
- The fruit of the native shrub is slightly larger and is said to be sweeter-tasting.

Regarding an inquiry about **Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*) not blooming**:

- My research doesn't provide a definitive response, but here are some questions to answer regarding factors that can have an effect on plant health:
  - Were the shrubs sold in containers? And, if so, were any of them "root-bound"? If the roots weren't loosened at the time of planting, they may not be able to spread out in order to absorb water and nourishment properly from the soil.
  - Do you know the acidity of the soil? Soil for Inkberry should be fertile (enriched by compost) and acidic with a pH not greater than 6.8.
  - Have you maintained a regular watering schedule? Inkberry prefers a soil that stays moist. In addition to the important initial watering, new shrubs should receive supplemental water for the first several years. After that, they require one inch of rain per week with supplementation of water during heatwaves.
  - Are the shrubs sited in full sun to part shade? A certain amount of sun exposure is necessary for flowering.
  - Have the shrubs been pruned at all? Inkberry blooms on "old wood" with buds developing on untrimmed stems from the previous year. Pruning in the late winter or early spring would reduce the number of flowers.
  - How mature were the shrubs when planted? Perhaps the shrubs are just taking their time to become established. Think of the gardening adage about growth of newly installed plants: The first year they sleep, the second year they creep, the third year they leap.



In answer to the question about **planting New Jersey Tea near a well or septic field:**

- Herbaceous plants, such as annuals, perennials, bulbs, and grasses are generally the best choices for planting on a septic drain field. Shrubs and trees are not recommended over any part of a septic system.
- See a [blog](#) from Michigan State University Extension for recommendations on native plants to plant on a drain field.
- The publication [“Landscaping Over Septic Systems with Native Plants”](#) from Perdue University Extension describes the use of native shrubs for concealing aboveground system components away from the soil absorption field. New Jersey Tea is one of the species recommended.