

Native Shrubs for Gloucester Gardens

By Susan Camp

We live in the land of old colonial gardens and newer, stylized versions of colonial gardens, where the central point and circling hedge are often English or American boxwoods. Lush, green, and cool when at their finest, boxwoods can prove to be needy and prone to fungal boxwood blight and *Phytophthora* root rot. They require many hours of loving care to avoid resembling oversized, poorly groomed Persian cats. The loss of a prized boxwood shrub from disease or poor maintenance is a sad and frustrating event.

Native shrubs can provide an authentic colonial look without the maintenance that boxwoods require. Yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*) and winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) are attractive shrubs that are resistant to many diseases that afflict other shrubs.

Yaupon holly is a broadleaf evergreen shrub or small tree, native to coastal areas of the southeastern United States, thriving in Zones 7 to 10. It prefers sandy, well-drained soil with a pH range of 3.7 to 6.8. It thrives in partial shade to full sun, but is adaptable to a variety of environmental conditions and tolerates heat, wind, and salt spray. Yaupon holly leaves are smooth and glossy dark green, about one inch long. Female plants produce shiny red or yellow drupes, each containing four to six seeds, which are dispersed by birds. To ensure fruit production, a male plant must be located near female plants. Some cultivars of Yaupon holly can grow to a height of 20 feet, but smaller, more compact cultivars are available, including 'Nana'/'Compacta', which grows to about 5 feet, and 'Schilling's Dwarf'/'Stokes Dwarf', a smaller, mounded cultivar. Although yaupon holly is resistant to most diseases and insects, it is susceptible to sooty mold and scale insects. Yaupon holly can be used as an accent or foundation plant or in a hedge. Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) Publications "Yaupon Holly Cultivars" and "Evergreen Hollies" provide basic information on yaupon holly.

Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) is a deciduous broadleaf shrub that can grow to a height of 10 feet. It is native to eastern North America, particularly wetland area in Zones 4 to 8. Winterberry requires partial shade to full sun and likes moist, acid soil with a high organic content. The glossy green leaves drop in the fall, leaving the red drupes on the branches as a bright spot of color in winter. Winterberry is easy to maintain. It should be pruned in early spring, which will decrease fruit production the next year, but increase fruiting in subsequent years. Like yaupon holly, winterberry requires a male plant for female plants to produce fruit. Many cultivars of winterberry have an open, informal habit, but compact cultivars like 'Red Sprite' have been developed. Read VCE Publication "Winterberry" for more information.

VCE Publication 426-701 "Shrubs: Functions, Planting, and Maintenance" provides valuable guidance on selecting the right shrub for your environment and general information on planting, watering, mulching, and pruning your new shrub. Publication 430-295 "Tree and Shrub Planting Guidelines" presents more detailed information on site preparation and planting.

Most shrubs will not require regular fertilizing, particularly if they are located near turfgrass, as they will obtain nutrients from the fertilized lawn. If you notice yellow leaves, premature leaf drop, and general loss of vigor, Publication 430-018 tells you how to fertilize your shrubs safely and effectively.

Winter injury from wind, freezing temperatures, dehydration, rodents, or heavy snow and ice buildup can damage or destroy shrubs and trees. Publication 426-500 “Managing Winter Injury to Trees and Shrubs” offers information on preventing, identifying, and treating damage that occurs during the winter.

Select new shrubs carefully, keeping in mind the hot, humid summers and unpredictable winters of our region. Native shrubs will be less invasive, more resilient, and less susceptible to many problems that occur in exotic species. Native shrubs will enliven your garden and provide years of beauty with a minimum of maintenance.

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