

Spirea

Spireas (*Spiraea* species) are among the easiest flowering shrubs to grow. There are two distinct kinds of spireas: the bridal wreath type, with clusters of white flowers on arching branches in spring; and the shrubby, much lower-growing type, which has pink, red or white flowers clustered at the end of upright branches in summer to fall.

MATURE HEIGHT/SPREAD

Vanhoutte spirea (*S. vanhouttei*), the classic bridal wreath spirea, is a deciduous broadleaf shrub that can grow 6 to 10 feet high and spread as much as 20 feet wide. The small leaves are blue-green in summer with no fall color. Masses of small, white flower clusters cover the plant in the spring.

Japanese spirea (*S. japonica*) is an upright shrubby spirea to 4 to 6 feet tall, with sharply toothed, oval, green leaves and flat clusters of pink flowers.

Reeves Spirea (*S. cantoniensis*) is a double-flowered white bridal wreath. The shrub grows 5 to 6 feet tall. In the Upper South the small green leaves may turn red in fall. Elsewhere, they remain on the plant without changing color. Baby's breath spirea, also called thunberg spirea or garland spirea (*S. thunbergii*) is a showy, graceful shrub, 3 to 5 feet high, with many slender, arching branches. The small, narrow, toothed leaves turn orange in late fall. The tiny white flowers are clustered in the axils along the stems. More than any other spirea, it has a feathery appearance.

Bumalda Spireas (*S. x bumalda*, a cross between *S. albiflora* and *S. japonica*) are all low, shrubby spireas, which bloom in summer to fall. They grow 2 to 3 feet tall and slightly wider and have pink or white flowers depending on the variety.

GROWTH RATE

Spireas grow very fast.

LANDSCAPE USE

Spireas are valued for their form and flowers. They are used as a specimen plant or as a hedge, screen, or border.

CULTIVATION

Spireas are easy to transplant. Spring or fall is the best planting time. The shrub prefers partial to full sun. Plant in full sun and open areas for best flowering. Spireas are tolerant of many soils except those that are extremely wet. The plant also likes mulch and summer watering. After flowering has finished, prune the mostly spring-blooming, bridal wreath spireas. Thin old and weak canes to the ground annually. Prune the summer-blooming, shrubby spireas in winter or early spring. They generally need less severe pruning than bridal wreath spireas. After flowers fade, remove them and a second flush of growth is stimulated, which will result in additional flowers.

PROBLEMS

Like other members of the rose family, spireas are susceptible to various pests and diseases, but none are serious. Aphids are occasionally a problem in the spring.

CULTIVARS AND VARIETIES

- Of the bumalda spireas, 'Anthony Waterer' is the best known variety. It grows to a height of only 3 feet and has reddish-pink flowers held in little umbrellas on the tips of the branches. The foliage is maroon-tinged.
- 'Coccinea' is like 'Anthony Waterer', but grows to 2 feet and has brighter flowers.

- ‘Dolchica’ grows to 2 feet and has deeply cut leaves and bright pink flowers and purplish new growth.
- ‘Goldflame’ has foliage that turns from green-gold to yellow to bronzy-orange in the fall. The flowers are crimson.
- ‘Goldmound’ is a compact, 1- to 3-foot shrub with yellow to chartreuse foliage and pink flowers.
- ‘Neon Flash’ grows to 4 feet tall and 5 feet wide. The foliage is purplish-tinged and the flowers are bright pink.
- ‘Shirobana’ is well-known for its multicolor effect. It bears clusters of white, pink and red flowers at the same time, with the color variation due to aging. It grows 2 to 3 feet tall.

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Some varieties of Japanese spirea are:

- ‘Alpina,’ also called daphne spirea, is a very low (to 1 foot) mound with pink flowers and foliage that turns red and orange in fall.
- ‘Fortunei’ is unusually tall (to 5 feet) with pink flowers.
- ‘Little Princess’ resembles ‘Alpina’ but is larger.
- ‘Magic Carpet’ grows to 2 feet tall and has reddish bronze new growth and chartreuse to yellow older foliage. The flowers are pink.

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