

Viburnum

This large group of plants consists of about 120 species and named cultivars and includes both deciduous and evergreen shrubs.

DESCRIPTION

Viburnums range in size from 2 feet to 30 feet. Their flowers range from very fragrant to very unpleasant and are primarily creamy white but can vary from white to pink. The individual florets grow in clusters usually found at the ends of the branches.

The brilliant colored fruits are yellow, orange, red, pink, blue or black. In general, heaviest fruit set occurs when several different cultivars that bloom at the same time are planted together. Viburnum flowers attract many butterflies, and the fruit clusters are popular with birds.

The foliage ranges from glossy green to a dull, dark green, velvet appearance to foliage that is thick and leathery. Fall coloration is an attractive feature of viburnum. In fall the leaf color ranges from a glossy red to scarlet or purple.

Most viburnums are dense shrubs forming a mass of green foliage, but some varieties grow as loose, open shrubs or small trees.

GROWTH RATE

Viburnums are moderate- to fast-growing plants. They grow from 1 foot to more than 2 feet per year.

LANDSCAPE USE

Viburnums are excellent hedge plants, foundation shrubs or specimen plants, depending on the mature height of the selection.

CULTIVATION

Most viburnums grow well when planted in moist, rich and slightly acidic soil (pH 5.5 to 6.5). Incorporate organic soil conditioner and mulch after planting. Most viburnums are sold in bloom and can be set out as soon as you take them home. Set the plants 4 to 10 feet apart, depending on the mature size of the cultivar. Viburnums prefer full sun to partial shade. Once established, they require very little care other than removal of old and weak canes. The height and spread of most viburnums can be regulated with selective pruning in early spring. Some evergreen kinds can be sheared.

PROBLEMS

Many viburnums are susceptible to leaf spot, which appears as gray-green, water-soaked spots on the leaves and young stems, enlarging into irregular, brown, sunken areas. Viburnums, which grow in shaded areas, are often attacked by powdery mildew. The European cranberry bush and the snowball viburnums are most susceptible to aphids. Aphids are small insects that cause twisting and curling of the stems and leaves. Other potential pests are thrips, spider mites, scale and root weevils. Nematodes can be a problem too. Nematodes are microscopic worms, which live in the soil and feed on the plant roots. Most viburnum are not seriously troubled by diseases or pests.

SPECIES AND CULTIVARS

The genus Viburnum is immense, and choosing the right selection for your garden is not easy. Listed below is an alphabetical list of the most common species and their cultivars.

Maple-leaf viburnum (*V. acerfolium*) is a deciduous shrub, 6 feet tall and 4 feet wide, with dark green leaves which have three lobes, like maple leaves. The leaves turn reddish purple in fall. The late-spring flowers are creamy white, flat-topped clusters, to 3 inches across. They are followed by blue-black berries in late summer. This species tolerates deep shade and dry soil.

Bodnant viburnum (*V. bodnantense*) is deciduous and grows to 10 feet or more. The oval, 1½- to 4-inch leaves turn dark scarlet in fall. Loose clusters of fragrant flowers bloom in winter but are often killed by the cold. The best known cultivar is 'Dawn.'

Burkwood viburnum (*V. burkwoodii*) is deciduous to semi-evergreen, 6 to 12 feet tall and 4 to 8 feet wide, with glossy dark green leaves with white, hairy undersides. The flowers are fragrant, white, 4-inch clusters, and the fruit is blue-black.

- 'Chenault' is more compact and later-blooming than the species.
- 'Mohawk' has red buds, which are showy long before they expand into white flowers. The fall color is bright orange. This cultivar is resistant to bacterial leaf spot.

Fragrant snowball (*V. carlecephalum*) is deciduous, 6 to 10 feet tall and wide. The leaves are 2 to 3 inches long and grayish green, turning purple in fall. The flowers are very fragrant, long-lasting, white, 4- to 5-inch clusters in spring.

Korean spice viburnum (*V. carlesii*) is deciduous, 4 to 8 feet tall and wide. The leaves are similar to those of fragrant snowball. The flowers are clove-scented, white, 2- to 3-inch clusters.

Witherod viburnum (*V. cassinoides*) is a deciduous, dense, rounded plant to 6 feet, with dark green leaves, which turn orange-red in fall. Flat clusters of white flowers in late spring are followed by mixed-color clusters of green, pink, red and blue fruits that eventually turn black. This species tolerates coastal conditions very well.

V. dentatum or Arrowwood is deciduous and grows 6 to 10 feet tall and as wide. The dark green, 4-inch leaves turn orange in fall. Cream-colored flowers in late spring are followed by blue-black fruit. This species tolerates heat, cold and alkaline soil.

Linden viburnum (*V. dilatatum*) is deciduous and grows to 8 to 10 feet tall and not quite as wide. The nearly round, gray-green leaves are 2 to 5 inches in diameter. The flowers are somewhat unpleasant smelling, white clusters in late spring, followed by red fruit. Outstanding selections include 'Catskill,' 'Erie', and 'Iroquois.'

Fragrant viburnum (*V. farreri*) is deciduous and grows to 12 feet tall and as wide. The smooth, green, oval, 1- to 3- inch leaves turn reddish purple in fall. Fragrant, white to pink flowers appear before the leaves open. Blossoms survive to 20 °F but are often browned by the cold. 'Album' has white flowers. Pink-flowered 'Nanum' is a low (to 2 feet) growing form.

Viburnum hybrids are plants of complex ancestry.

- 'Chesapeake' is semi-evergreen, 6 feet tall and 10 feet wide with wavy-edged, dark green leaves and small, fragrant, white flowers and black fruit.
- 'Conoy' is evergreen, to 5 feet tall and 8 feet wide.
- 'Eskimo' is semi-evergreen and grows to 5 feet tall and wide.

Japanese viburnum (*V. japonicum*) is evergreen and grows to 20 feet. The leathery, glossy green leaves are 6 inches long. Flowers are white and berries are red.

- 'Chippewa' and 'Huron' are hardier to cold.

Judd viburnum (*V. juddii*) is deciduous and resembles *V. carlesii*.

Wayfaring tree (*V. lantana*) is deciduous and grows to 20 feet. The leaves are 2 to 5 inches long and dark-green. The flat, 3- to 5-inch clusters of white flowers are followed by yellow fruits, which gradually turn red, then black. All three colors may be present at the same time. This species tolerates drought and lime soils better than most viburnums.

Nannyberry (*V. lentago*) is deciduous and will grow as a single-trunked tree to 30 feet or as a massive shrub to lesser height. The flowers are white and the berries are red, turning black.

Chinese snowball (*V. macrocephalum*) is deciduous and grows to 20 feet. The spectacular, 6- to 8- inch flower clusters are composed of sterile blossoms that are lime green at first, changing to white. Flowers are not followed by fruit.

Sweet viburnum (*V. odoratissimum*) is evergreen and grows to 20 feet. The flowers appear in conical, 3- to 6- inch clusters and are white and lightly fragrant in spring.

- ‘Emerald Lustre’ has larger leaves than the typical 3- to 8- inch long leaves of the species.

European cranberry bush (*V. opulus*) is deciduous and grows 8 to 15 feet tall and wide with arching branches. The maplelike leaves are dark green, turning bright red in fall. The white flowers consist of 2- to 4- inch clusters of small fertile blossoms ringed with larger sterile blossoms for a lace cap effect. Selections include:

- ‘Aureum’ - to 10 feet with golden yellow foliage;
- ‘Compactum’ - grows only 4 to 5 feet high and wide;
- ‘Nanum’ - grows only to 2 feet tall and wide and needs trimming as a low hedge with neither flowers nor fruits;
- ‘Roseum’ or common snowball grows to 15 feet and has flower clusters composed entirely of sterile flowers (so no fruit).

Japanese snowball (*V. plicatum plicatum*) is deciduous and grows 8 to 15 feet tall and wide. Showy, 3-inch, snowball-like clusters of white sterile flowers resemble those of *V. opulus*.

Doublefile viburnum (*V. plicatum tomentosum*) is deciduous and resembles Japanese snowball, but the midspring flower display consists of small, fertile flowers in 2- to 4-inch clusters edged with sterile flowers in a lace cap effect. The fruit is red, aging to black. Excessive summer heat and drought may result in leaf scorch. Some good selections are ‘Cascade,’ ‘Mariesii,’ ‘Newport,’ ‘Pink Beauty,’ ‘Shasta’ and ‘Shoshoni’.

Black haw (*V. prunifolium*) is deciduous and grows to 15 feet tall and wide. The plant resembles hawthorn (*Crataegus*) and grows best in full sun.

Leatherleaf viburnum (*V. rhytidophyllum*) is evergreen and narrow, upright to 15 feet. The leaves will drop in cold weather.

Tea viburnum (*V. setigerum*) is deciduous and grows to 12 feet. The shrub is often bare at the base. The leaves, once used for tea, are 3 to 6 inches long, dark green, turning purple in fall. The white flowers are not striking, but the heavy production of scarlet fruit makes this the showiest of fruiting viburnums.

American cranberry bush (*V. trilobum*) is deciduous and grows 10 to 15 feet tall. The leaves and flowers resemble those of European cranberry bush.

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