

Sensational Spring Shrubs

Shrubs are the backbones of our gardens – they provide color, contrast and add needed year around structure to landscapes. A vast range of selections are out there allowing you to add something to any garden location that catches your fancy. Broadleaf evergreens provide year around foliage and presence. Deciduous shrubs offer seasonal foliage and fall color. There are so many choices available for you to express your style!

Always be sure to utilize the right shrub for the right place in the garden. Sun or shade? Growth habit? Can it be pruned? What shape/how fast will it grow? How much room do I have? Blooms on old wood or new growth? When does it flower? Add some foliage color or contrast? Need evergreen or deciduous? Answering questions like these will allow you to choose a shrub that will bring you years of enjoyment in the landscape.

Consider using shrubs as foundation plants, in mass plantings, as hedges/screens/barriers, or as garden specimens. Sometimes one fills the bill, but other times using them in groupings or swaths is the way to go. Think about height, habit and foliage – contrast of color and foliage often makes a more interesting landscape. Always consider the layering technique – you can have height in back and work your way down to shorter border plants in foreground.

Now, as one of our growers, Bailey Nursery, would say “Get your shrub on - let’s get twiggy with it!”

Let’s take a look at sun vs. shade shrubs for the spring season and some fabulous foliage shrubs for PNW gardens...

Spring Bloomers for Sun/Part Shade: There is a huge selection of Rhododendrons, Azaleas and Camellias for our PNW gardens. We can find a color and bloom time to meet almost every need.

When choosing a **Rhododendron**, pay attention to foliage and growth habit, and not just the flower. With over 5,000 hybrids of Rhododendrons (and numerous species) available to us in the PNW, there are options. Look at hardiness for your particular microclimate – keeping in mind Rhodies are classified as H-1, H-2, H-3 and so on. H-3 are usually okay here (down to 10 degrees or so), H-1 and H-2 are plenty hardy. Look at bloom season – in the spring we can go from very early all the way to very late, and all times in between. Finally look for your preferred color.

For **Azaleas**, keep in mind that most reds and purples do better in full sun, all colors do well in part sun/part shade, and whites and lighter pinks can tolerate more shade. Shear to keep compact and bushy or allow to grow more open and tall - the choice is yours. Like Rhodies, the number of choices is overwhelming – explore your options. There are some great “oldies but goodies”, and some useful more modern varieties like the ‘Kimono Series’ too. Look at ones that have foliage color in winter for added interest – ‘Girard’s Fuchsia’, ‘Maraschino’ and ‘Johanna’, to name a few. Even a nice variegated foliage selection like ‘Silver Sword’ or ‘Girard’s Variegated Gem’ will add some color foliage when not in bloom. There are a number of repeat (spring and late summer) blooming choices. Be careful though, most have not been the hardiest choices for us in the PNW. The best ones I have tried are ‘Double Shot’ (available in a few colors) and new for 2023 is the ‘Perfecto Mundo Series’ from Proven Winners, that promises to be more cold hardy and sports double blooms in a few colors.

Camellias can handle mostly sun (if irrigated in dry summers) and mostly shade, but ideally these are perfect part sun/part shade specimens. Most will grow larger with age, and bloom time can vary from winter into later spring, depending on the variety. Again, literally hundreds of choices provided PNW gardeners with all kinds of colors and flower forms alike. Lots of old classics – some of newer ones that attract attention are ‘Julius Nuccio’, ‘Vestito Rosso’, and ‘Autumn Rocket’ (coming fall ’23). Sometimes in late cold snaps we do get some bud freeze, which means lack of flowers. If this is a concern for your garden, search out the ‘Ice Angels Series’ – these are hybrids a full zone hardier and offer more reliable bloom. Some great choices are ‘April Remembered’, ‘Spring’s Promise’ and ‘Winter’s Snowman’.

Pieris (Lily of the Valley shrub): Lots of evergreen choices, from dwarf to taller. Blooms can be white, pink or red. Suggestions: 'Little Heath', 'Flaming Silver', 'Tiki', 'Impish Elf', 'Passion Frost', 'Mountain Fire'.

Mock Orange: Deciduous and super fragrant white flowers. New varieties are more manageable, like 'Snow White' or 'Snowbelle'. Forms nice and arching with yellow fall color.

Forsythia: A PNW harbinger of spring with golden yellow flowers.

Barberry: Yes they are thorny, but they are still spectacular! Both evergreen and deciduous choices, offering yellow to even orangish spring flower. Foliage color and growth habits on the deciduous choices are plentiful – bright golds, oranges, reds, and purples can be used and forms from tight tidy dwarfs to even narrower uprights. A few suggestions - 'Golden Nugget', 'Golden Ruby', 'Orange Rocket', 'Helmond Pillar', 'Concorde', and 'Rosey Glow'.

Weigela: Some great modern choices on these, boasting great flower and foliage interest as well. Some now even repeat bloom again in summer. Hummingbird and pollinator magnets!

Lilacs: The great old-fashioned deciduous favorite for fragrance in the spring garden. Classic choices and also newer repeat flowering ones as well. I love the US Arboretum selections like 'Old Glory', 'Betsy Ross' and 'Vibrant Violet' from Bailey Nursery's First Edition Program.

Deutzia: Another classic deciduous old-fashioned shrub with great white or pink spring color. More manageable in size now, try ones like 'Yuki Cherry Blossom'. Some combine bloom with bright foliage as well, like 'Chardonnay Pearls'.

Sweetspire: One of the most versatile deciduous shrubs for both wet and dry soil. Fragrant white flowers and spectacular red color in fall. Nice compact newer ones, like 'Love Child'.

Spiraea: Another versatile deciduous choice for wetter spots in the garden. LOTS to choose from here, including many that boast showy spring foliage color and repeat flowering attributes.

Viburnums: Evergreen and deciduous choices here. *V. tinus* (and cultivars) and *V. davidii* are both evergreen and useful. Many deciduous ones, including 'Doublefile Viburnum', 'Korean Spice Viburnum', 'Killamanjaro', 'Popcorn', 'Mary Milton', 'Molly Schroeder', 'Pink Dawn' and others. Many deciduous ones add fragrance and form nicely sized specimens in the landscape, adding great fall color as well.

Quince: Another deciduous spring favorite that blooms early on bare wood in pink, red, orange, or white. Newer 'Double Take Series' is outstanding.

Flowering Currant: Early blooming native deciduous plant that is a hummingbird/pollinator favorite.

Abelias: These bloom in summer, but many have outstanding foliage color. Easy and drought tolerant for sure. 'Kaleidoscope', 'Magic Daydream', 'Tres Amigos' and many others are worth consideration.

Pearl Bush: *Exochorda* is deciduous and offers pure white pearl-like flowers that hang down in spring. Usually 'The Bride' is the variety to find.

California Lilac (*Ceanothus*): One of few blue blooming shrubs we can utilize. Evergreen, drought tolerant and salt tolerant. Look at sizes of cultivars – 'Victoria' (large), 'Dark Star' (smaller) and 'Julia Phelps' (smaller), to name a few. Even newer 'Lemon Ice' adds golden variegated foliage as well.

Mexican Orange: *Choisya* offers evergreen structure, drought tolerance, and fragrant white orange blossom-like flowers. 'Sundance' adds lime to gold foliage, 'Goldfingers' adds dissected golden foliage, 'Aztec Pearl' adds cut green foliage, and of course the original is nice as well.

Osmanthus: Evergreen and fragrant white spring blossoms. A few species (mainly *O. burkwoodii* and *O. delevayii*) are available and all make great specimens, even a hedge or large plant with age. Some of holly leafed Osmanthus (*O. heterophyllus*) offer exquisite foliage, like 'Party Lights' (pink/white/cream) or 'Goshiki' (coppery/yellow/green).

Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia*): Evergreen and drought tolerant. Some of most intricate flowers in nature available in the a number of colors. Typically you will choose a bud color and flower color and striping color – a very unique combination.

Spring Bloomers for Part Shade/Shade

Winter Hazel: *Corylopsis* are deciduous and offer nice yellow bloom early. *C. pauciflora* (Buttercup Winterhazel) and *C. spicata* (Spike Winterhazel) are both useful, the spike growing much larger with age. The golden leafed variety adds foliage interest as well.

Diervilla: These deciduous beauties are called Bush Honeysuckle and honestly can be used anywhere, including in poor soil. The ‘Kodiak Series’ from Proven Winners in the way to go – all bloom yellow late spring into summer, but choose your foliage, like ‘Kodiak Orange’ or ‘Kodiak Red’ for example.

Fothergilla: One of my favs for all seasons. Fragrant white spring bloom and spectacular fall color on this deciduous choice. Attractive shrub that can be found in even a blue foliage color as well.

Osmamthus: See sun list above, but many can be grown in shade as well. Some of variegated choices will brighten up the garden with foliage for sure.

Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia*): See sun list above, but these will grow in shade as well. Keep in mind deep shade will sacrifice some flower power, so at least half day is ideal.

Sarcococca: These evergreen and fragrant white bloomers are perfect for any amount of shade and thrive in even dry shade. They start blooming late winter and carry into spring. Pick you specie, from low and spreading to tall and arching.

Leucothoe: This PNW native is evergreen and blooms white in spring. Useful shrub that can add foliage color as well. ‘Scarletta’ adds deep red foliage tips and ‘Rainbow’ adds variegation interest. Some newer flavors, like ‘Curly Red’ and others, add even more interest. Lots of choices here.

Skimmia: An old fashioned evergreen staple for shade. Keep in mind, with traditional *Skimmia* we have a “male” and a “female”, both bloom early spring – but if you want to add berry interest, be sure to have a “female” pollinated by a “male”. A self-fertile option is ‘Reeves’ *Skimmia*.

Daphne odora: Evergreen *Daphnes* are great in morning sun and well drained locations. Super fragrant flowers in early spring. Newer flavors like ‘Rebecca’, ‘Banana Split’ and ‘Maejima’ offer superior and consistent bright yellow variegation.

Oregon Grape: These PNW natives are evergreen and useful in many garden settings. Drought tolerant and a fav of early pollinators, including hummingbirds. Choose specie for size – from ground cover to low shrub to a bit taller shrub.

Foliage Shrubs for Sun/Part Shade (Spring/Summer): Look to utilize foliage colors and variegation to add interest to the landscape in sunny spots. These all bloom in various times of the year as well.

Barberry: Listed above as they bloom in spring, but again super spring foliage plant as well for sun. We have some much green around, but something yellow, orange or red really pops in spring.

Willows: Useful deciduous native-type plant for many areas, including wet soils. Some great foliage choices (and of course late winter bloom) can be found. Dappled Willow (*Salix* ‘Hakuro Nishiki’ or ‘Flamingo’) offer pink/white/green variegated foliage and can even be found as a small grafted tree. ‘Iceberg Alley’ from Bailey Nursery has nice greyish foliage. Others like *Salix boydii* and ‘Silver Fox’ are fun as well.

Smoke Bush: These deciduous plants offer summer bloom, but spring brings on bright gold or red or purple foliage, depending on the variety. Look for ‘Golden Spirit’, ‘Grace’, or ‘Royal Purple’. Even a sweet new dwarf called ‘Velveteeny’ for smaller garden spaces.

Euonymus: Huge selection of evergreen Euonymus offering many growth habits and excellent variegated in cream and/or yellow. From low shrubs to taller shrubs, these drought tolerant beauties can be used all over the landscape. ‘Blondy’, ‘Gold Splash’, ‘Chollipo’, ‘Silver King’ and many others are worth trying.

Twig Dogwoods: PNW deciduous native that offers twig color and bloom/berries, BUT if you want foliage look at all the cool varieties out there. ‘Ivory Halo’ (white/green), ‘Hedgerow Gold’ (yellow/green) or even ‘Neon Burst’ (bright pure gold) and others offer great foliage.

Ninebarks: Some of most colorful shrubs for spring on a larger scale. Dwarfs (4’) like ‘Lucky Devil’ or ‘Spicy Devil’ are sweet, and larger (8’) growers like ‘Fireside’ or ‘Amber Jubilee’ are striking.

Elderberries: Lots of great choices here as well, all growing larger with age. ‘Black Lace’, ‘Laced Up’, ‘Instant Karma’, ‘Black Beauty’ and ‘Lemony Lace’ are few to consider. Nice spring bloom as well, and if pollinated, berries for the birds to enjoy.

Japanese Holly: Nice green choices, but look at variegated choices like ‘Drops of Gold’ or ‘Lemon Gem’ to add some foliage interest.

Buxus: Plain old boxwood doesn’t have to be plain! Nice variegated choices on this evergreen garden staple – ‘Golden Triumph’ (yellow/green) or old fashioned variegated boxwood can be found with either cream/white or yellow variegation.

Box Honeysuckle: Evergreen arching shrub available in many colors. From ‘Silver Beauty’ to ‘Edmee Gold’ to ‘Lemon Beauty’ to ‘Red Tip’ and many others, they all will add some sweet foliage and structure as shrubs in the landscape.

Foliage Shrubs for Part Shade/Shade (Spring/Summer): Utilize variegation and bold colors in the shade to add contrast and brighten up dark areas in shade. These all bloom in various times of the year, but their foliage, to me, is the main interest.

Japanese Holly: See list directly above, as these will thrive in almost all locations but deep shade.

Distyliums: A plant that will grow most anywhere and tolerate soils of all kinds. These bloom in winter and are evergreen, but in spring many cultivars offer bright new growth as well. Consider ‘Cinnamon Girl’ and ‘Linebacker’ and others too.

Box Honeysuckle: See list directly above, but many will do shade also, just not deep shade.

Osmanthus: See spring bloomers for shade list above, and in particular the Variegated Osmanthus (white/green) will thrive in all conditions but a deep shade garden.

Aucuba: The Japanese Laurels take deep shade and offer large variegated foliage to brighten up shade gardens. Lots of choices out there and if you like yellow variegation and have shade, these are for you.

Fatsia (Aralia): Another spectacular foliage plant for shade with huge tropical-ish foliage. Some great flavors out there, from ‘Spider Web’ (white/green) to ‘Camouflage’ (lime/dark/yellow).

One last thing, if you look you can find a variegated selection of just about anything out there – explore your options!