

Blooming Deciduous Trees and Shrubs: A Toronto Master Gardeners Guide

Deciduous trees and shrubs are plants that lose their leaves in the fall. Trees are generally single stemmed while shrubs tend to be multi-stemmed plants. In the fall, the leaves of some trees and shrubs change colour to vibrant hues of red, yellow or orange before losing them altogether. The intensity of the fall colour will often depend on the growing conditions of the season.

Most trees and shrubs bloom in the spring before their leaves emerge. As always, there are exceptions. For example, *Buddleia davidii* (Butterfly Bush) blooms in mid-summer while *Hibiscus syriacus* (Rose of Sharon), and *Caryopteris clandonensis* (Blue Mist Shrub) bloom in late summer.



Flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) is very showy in Spring.

Photo: Helen Battersby



'Maiden's Blush' lilac (*Syringa hyacinthiflora* 'Maiden's Blush') is a very fragrant cultivar.

Photo: Helen Battersby

Both trees and shrubs provide visually pleasing colourful flowers, scent, contrast, vertical and horizontal height and form to the landscape. As an added bonus, many blooming trees and shrubs produce colourful fruit or berries in the fall, attracting wildlife and extending their interest into the winter.

Choosing the Right Blooming Tree or Shrub Location in the Garden

A strategically placed flowering tree or shrub can be used as a focal point in the garden. Tiered plantings are also an option, with taller growing material planted toward the back of the garden and shorter material in front. This arrangement will allow all of the plants to be seen.

Flowering ornamental fruit trees may be outstanding in the spring. However, bear in mind the possibility of messy fallen fruit that may come later in the summer or fall. Avoid planting them near walkways or driveways.

When planting, the size at maturity (height x width) should also be taken into consideration. Is there plenty of growing space away from buildings and overhead wires?

Hardiness Zone

Hardiness zones are another very important consideration when selecting flowering shrubs or trees. Make sure the tree or shrub you are considering will survive in your area. Check the tag when purchasing as it will tell you the minimum winter temperature the plant can tolerate.

Lighting

Lighting is important to consider when choosing a flowering tree or shrub. For your new plant to thrive, it must have the right amount of light. Six plus hours is deemed full sun, whether it's direct late-morning or afternoon sun. Four to six hours is considered partial sun and less than four hours is considered full shade (no direct sun but in a bright location). The tag on your new plant will have an icon representing the plant's light requirements. If it says full sun and your garden is shady, don't buy it!

Soil Type

Is the soil acidic or alkaline? It may be necessary to do a soil analysis to determine whether your soil is suited to the tree or shrub you have chosen. Amendments may be necessary in order to be sure your new plant will thrive in your garden. Also check to see whether your soil is clay, loam or sandy. This may also affect the ability for your plant to bloom and thrive. Ultimately, the best approach is to choose the right plant for the right location to ensure its health and vigor.

Maintenance

Shrubs and trees will require little maintenance if they are sited and planted properly with the required nutrients. They must be watered regularly until established and also in times of drought. Make sure you use the original soil and top dress every spring with good compost, well-rotted manure, or quality organic fertilizer.

Pruning

Pruning is a method of controlling growth, shape and enhancing the quality or quantity of flowers and fruit on trees and shrubs.

Always use sharp tools and sterilize the tools with a mixture of 1 part bleach to 10 parts water after each cut to prevent the spread of disease. Remove branches that are dead, diseased, or damaged. Try to remove the pruned material out through the crown, do not drag the material through the branches. Dragging diseased branches through the crown can spread the disease through the tree. You may also want to consider removing branches that do not go with the character of the tree or shrub.

Thinning out branches by pruning should also be considered as it improves air circulation which helps to prevent mould. Thinning also increases light penetration to the center of the tree or shrub, thus improving photosynthesis.

It is important to know when to prune your flowering trees and shrubs. Some trees and shrubs flower on the current year's wood and others bloom on last year's wood. If you prune them at the wrong time, you may eliminate flower buds and end up with a poor show.

Some examples of shrubs that flower on the current year's wood are: *Hydrangea quercifolia* (Oakleaf Hydrangea), *Berberis thunbergii* (Barberry) and *Weigela florida* (Weigelas). Generally, shrubs in this category are pruned in the spring. Shrubs that flower on last years wood are : *Syringa vulgaris* (Lilac), Forsythia, *Deutzia gracilis* (Deutzia), and *Philadelphus viginalis* (Mock orange). Generally, shrubs in this category are pruned directly after the blooms have faded and before next year's buds have formed.

Suggested Blooming Trees and Shrubs

Trees

Malus x robusta – Cherry Crabapple

Cornus florida – Dogwood

Laburnum anagyroides – Golden Chain tree



The flowering crabapple (*Malus* spp.) comes in colours, white through deep pink.

Photo: Helen Battersby



Laburnum gets its common name golden chain tree for obvious reasons. Take care, as all parts of the plant, especially the seeds, are poisonous.

Photo: Helen Battersby

Magnolia macrophylla – Magnolia
Hibiscus syriacus – Rose of Sharon
Liriodendron – Tulip Tree

Shrubs

Azalea – Azalea
Kolkwitzia – Beauty Bush
Callicarpa – Beauty Berry
Hydrangea macrophylla – Bigleaf Hydrangea
Caryopteris clandonensis – Blue Mist Shrub
Spiraea prunifolia – Bridal Wreath Spirea
Daphne x burkwoodii – Burkwood Daphne
Buddleia – Butterfly Bush
Viburnum trilobum – Cranberry Bush
Potentilla – Cinquefoil
Syringa vulgaris – Common Lilac
Fothergilla gardenii – Dwarf Fothergilla
Sambucus canadensis – Elderberry
Forsythia – Forsythia
Hamamelis x intermedia – Hybrid Witch Hazel
Philadelphus – Mock Orange
Physocarpus – Ninebark
Hydrangea quercifolia – Oak-Leaf Hydrangea
Salix – Pussy Willow
Hibiscus syriacus – Rose-of Sharon
Clethra alnifolia – Summer- Sweet
Weigela florida – Weigela



Blooms of the hybrid form of witch hazel (*Hamamelis x intermedia*) are welcome in Spring.

Photo: Helen Battersby

References

2. Thomas, William, ed *Hearst Garden Guides. Trees and Shrubs*. New York: Hearst Books, 1992
3. Hyland, Bob. *Brooklyn Garden, Shrubs, The New Glamor Plants*. 1994

Produced by the Toronto Master Gardeners, these Gardening Guides provide introductory information on a variety of gardening topics.

Toronto Master Gardeners are part of a large, international volunteer community, all committed to providing the public with horticultural information, education and inspiration. Our goal is to help Toronto residents use safe, effective, proven and sustainable horticultural practices to create gardens, landscapes and communities that are both vibrant and healthy.

If you have further gardening questions, reach us at our gardening advice line **416 397 1345** or by posting your question online in the Ask a Master Gardener section. To book Toronto Master Gardener volunteers for talks, demonstrations, advice clinics, or other services, please contact us at **416 397 1345** or bookamg@torontomastergardeners.ca

Date revised: January 2012