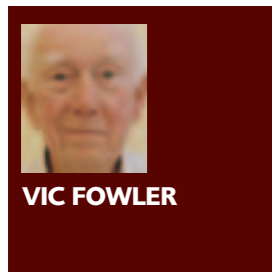


# Vic's favourite shrubs



VIC FOWLER

In this article I will discuss my favourite shrubs. Not included are those shrubs that are climbers, or best against a wall or fence. Also gardeners' most popular plants – roses. Both these will be discussed separately in future articles.

## Hydrangeas

These can be divided into mopheads or lacecaps. The former have spherical flower heads. Even if bought blue in colour, on our soil, with a pH over 5.5, they will quickly turn pink. The white ones are unaffected, a good white is *H.arborescens* 'Annabell', put in sun or partial shade. There are plenty of pink ones displayed at garden centres. Lacecaps have flat-heads with small fertile flowers in the centre surrounded by much larger petal-like (really sepals) flowers. A lacecap that I particularly like is *H.villosa*. This and some of its close relatives, is the only group I know that retain their blue colours on our alkaline soil. When in bloom in late summer it is breath-takingly beautiful. The flowers are purple in the centre surrounded by bluish-white petals. It can be scorched by late frosts, after it has come into leaf, but usually recovers with a fresh flush of growth. However, if this occurs future growth during the



HYDRANGEA VILLOSA



CEANOTHUS (BLUE MOUND)

season is restricted, so it is worth protecting with a fleece when frosts are forecast after the first leaves have appeared.

## Viburnums

*Viburnum carlesii* is grown mainly for its very fragrant flowers that appear in mid-late spring. Try and get one of the two varieties either 'Diana' or 'Aurora', these have larger flowers in the form of rounded clusters, both have the RHS award of garden merit (AGM). They grow up to 6ft in height.

Another *Viburnum* worth considering is *V.plicatam* 'lanarth'. It has layered branches with white flowers along each length and once established produces a layered effect, often likened to a wedding cake. Eventually it can reach 10ft but if this is too tall prune out the top tier after flowering.

## Daphnes

This is a group of highly fragrant shrubs. I grow *Daphne odora* which is more often obtainable as 'Aurea Marginata' having leaves with yellow margins. When it flowers in late spring



VIBURNUM CARLESII



MAGNOLIA WILSONII

it's fragrance will turn heads. Good for cutting, remove just the flower head with a short length of stalk attached and put in a small, narrow-necked vase. Prefers being in shade but not dry shade. May reach a height of 5ft. I regard this as a must for all gardens.

## Kolkwitzia

*K.amabilis*, also known as beauty bush, can grow up to 10ft high, it can be kept smaller by removing the top branches after flowering. Pink and white flowers are produced on long drooping branches in late spring. Variety 'Pink cloud' has larger blooms. Plant in full sun or partial shade.

## Ceanothus

Blue-flowered *Ceanothus* are always much admired when in flower. They require a sunny position sheltered from cold winds. Flower colour ranges from dark blue to sky blue. Most grow fairly tall up to 12ft high or more and once planted do not respond well to being moved, so think about where to position a plant before purchase. *C.thyriflora* 'repens' is a low spreading one about 3ft high, bearing Cambridge



DAPHNE ODORA

blue flowers in spring, another of its varieties 'Ken Taylor' is even lower being about 12in high. *C.arborescens* includes 'Blue Mound' with deep blue flowers in spring, height about 5ft, 'Cascade' is a lovely hybrid about 12ft high with similar coloured flowers, 'Delight' is 5ft high with powder blue flowers and *C.dentatus* about 5ft high with bright blue flowers in late spring. Most of these have the RHS award of garden merit (RGM).

## Magnolias

Readily available, with tulip-shaped white flowers flushed with purple at the base is *Mxsoulangiana*. Try and buy a specimen with many shoots at the base. If it is single stemmed it will grow into a tree. One I particularly like is *M.wilsonii* which produces saucer-shaped, single flowers that hang down and have a central portion of red stamens that add to the attraction. It is best in partial shade and is lime-tolerant. Provide protection from late frosts with a fleece once it has broken into leaf. Flowers appear shortly afterwards but the leaves readily become scorched and flowers suffer too. It usually shoots again but future growth is restricted and you lose the flowers for that season. If it grows vigorously then you will need to cut off the apical growth and encourage side shoots to develop. It does make an attractive small tree.

## Acers

Many of these, also known as maples, are trees. It is the Japanese acers with finely divided leaves that attract most people. But they can be expensive to buy. They are renowned for their autumn colour. To thrive they should be planted in a place sheltered from cold winds in sun or partial shade. *A.palmatum* 'dissectum' has green, much-divided leaves in summer and turns red in autumn. A close relative is *A.p.'Dissectum Atropurpureum'* with deep reddish foliage turning yellow in autumn, it contrasts well with above. Both are regarded as small shrubs. There are several others but if you like those with delicately cut leaves then go for these two.

There are other shrubs that could have been included such as lilacs which become rather large, buddlias that attract butterflies and should be hard pruned each spring to within 1 or 2 ft from the ground: Forsythias with yellow flowers along their branches in early spring that can be cut when in bud to provide flowers for the house, otherwise tends to be an untidy grower: *Spiraea* 'Arguta' 'Bridal wreath' with white flowers in late spring, looks good in flower: *Deutzias* are worth considering with flower colours ranging from white to dark red: *Cornus* (Dogwoods) are mostly grown for their red or yellow stems, in winter, prune hard back in spring. A shrub I would not grow is *Pyracantha* which grows with an entangled mass of foliage and has vicious spines.

## Frost and garden plants

As we are approaching winter it is a timely moment to discuss frost. Ground frost occurs when the temperature at ground level is at or below 0 degrees C. It is usually recognisable by the ice crystals that make a white coat over the soil surface. It is measured at 2in above ground level. This does little harm to woody hardy garden plants because the lower part of the stem is naturally well-protected, so is able to cope. Above this if the air is at or below 0 degrees C it is called an air frost, which is officially measured at 6ft above ground level. This is a frost most damaging to plants, especially when late frosts occur in May after many plants have come into leaf. Then it is advisable to protect vulnerable plants. The straight forward way to do this is by tying fleece at the base of the plant and draping it over the plant. Keep it in place with clothes pegs. Although it doesn't enhance the garden it can be left in place without harming the plant in any way.

On sloping ground frost drains downhill so it tends to accumulate in the lowest parts of the garden producing a frost pocket or if the progress of the frost is interrupted by an obstacle like a wall or fence then it can form there. Not much can be done about this but it is best to avoid planting vulnerable plants in such situations. **NN**

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