



MASTER GARDENER

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Year Round Gardening

ADDING NATIVE SHRUBS TO YOUR LANDSCAPE

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When planning your landscape, shrubs can add great aesthetic value. If you are looking to add a few shrubs to your yard, consider selecting from a wide variety of native shrubs. Native shrubs are part of our natural heritage and ecosystem of Colorado, and native plant communities make Colorado visually distinct from other parts of the United States.

Native shrubs attract a variety of native mammals, birds and butterflies. As natural habitat is removed from urban settings due to rapid growth, biodiversity is reduced. Adding native shrubs and plants can help maintain a diverse ecosystem.

When correctly sited, native shrubs can be ideal for a sustainable landscape and require less external inputs such as watering, fertilizing and pruning. Colorado has five distinct life zones based on elevation and vegetation types. They are plains, upper Sonoran, foothills, subalpine and alpine. Determining your life zone and understanding the vegetation it will support is a great first step in plant selection. Next consider the plant's moisture, light and soil requirements.

Read more about life zones and see a list of native shrubs for Colorado landscapes at: <https://extension.colostate.edu/docs/pubs/garden/07422.pdf>.

Good selection of native shrubs will maximize survival with minimal inputs. Before selecting and planting a native shrub, consider the cultural requirements. For example, a red twig dogwood, which has a higher moisture requirement, should not be sited with plants that require only minimal water. It also should not be planted on a south facing



slope where more moisture would be required to sustain the shrub. The red-twig dogwood, *Cornus sericea*, is shade tolerant and has berries that attract birds.

Most shrubs are sold as container grown plants. Container-grown shrubs can be planted any time during the growing season. After planting a native shrub, additional water may be needed until it establishes. This could mean regular water for a growing season plus winter watering.

Native shrubs can be used in non-irrigated pockets of a landscaped garden. Fremont mahonia, *Mahonia fremontii*, has blue holly-like leaves, and fragrant yellow flowers in spring followed by red berries and has a low moisture requirement. A smaller variety, *Mahonia repens*, can sometimes be considered a groundcover. These broadleaf evergreens can add great summer and winter interest. It is possible to include non-native with native shrubs. Many non-native shrubs adapt to Colorado's climate and can be used in a native landscape as long as moisture, light and soil requirements are met.

Before completing your design, check with your homeowner's association in case there are regulations for plant selection.

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research-based answers. The Help Desk opened April 15 at 17 N. Spruce St. Hours are 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays. Call 520-7684 or email

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