



# TREES & SHRUBS

## Shrubs for Mountain Communities no. 7.407

by J.R. Feucht <sup>1</sup>

### Quick Facts...

Consider length of growing season, soil and exposure before selecting shrubs for specific sites.

Plant shrubs only in the spring.

Select them, where possible, from northern sources.

A natural mulch over the root area helps delay freezing of the soil in the fall and aids in retaining soil moisture.

### Shrub Establishment

Use the list of shrubs provided here as a guide to select those most adaptable to elevation and exposure. The list does not take into consideration the wide range of climatic and soil conditions possible at a given elevation. Some things that should be taken into consideration are:

- **Soil moisture and drainage.** The list includes a notation on special moisture and drainage conditions for best performance and survival.
- **Exposure.** Some plants perform better in the shade, some in full sun.
- **Length of frost-free period.** Some shrubs may survive at a given elevation but not produce flowers or fruit due to a short frost-free period.

Plant shrubs as early in spring as possible. Avoid fall planting.

The condition of nursery-grown stock at planting time is important. Most nursery stock in Colorado is grown below 6,000 feet. It may be in a succulent stage and not hardened enough to withstand the conditions found at higher elevations at planting time. Acclimate such plants by gradual exposure to mountain conditions for a period of several days or weeks.

Use natural mulches, such as pine needles and wood chips, around the shrub to delay freezing of the soil in the fall. A mulch 4 to 6 inches deep over the root area forms an effective insulation against early freezes and helps maintain a better moisture supply in the soil. Avoid finely pulverized peat and other materials that tend to cake or crust.

Gravelly soils that are too loose or clay soils that are too tight can be improved with compost, peat, aged manure, sand, or a combination of these and other amendments. Work these amendments into the soil where the tree will be planted to improve the soil used to fill in around the tree.

### Shrub Selection

Table 1 lists shrubs hardy to 8,000 to 10,000 feet.

**Table 1: Shrubs for mountain communities.**

<b>SHRUBS HARDY TO AT LEAST 10,000 FEET ELEVATION</b>		
<b>Scientific name</b>	<b>Common name</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<i>Alnus tenuifolia</i>	Thinleaf alder	Native shrub for moist soils. Often grown as a multi-stem, treelike clump.
<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>	Serviceberry	Native. Useful on rocky, dry slopes. Edible blue fruit.
<i>Betula glandulosa</i>	Bog birch	Dwarf native for moist soils. Hardy above timberline.
<i>Caragana arborescens</i>	Siberian peashrub	Tolerates dry sites. Yellow, sweet-pea-like flowers in early summer.
<i>Cercocarpus montanus</i>	Mountain mahogany	Native. Useful on dry, south slopes. Showy, feather-like seed heads in fall. More common below 8,500 feet.
<i>Cotoneaster acutifolia</i>	Peking cotoneaster	Hardy above 10,000 feet. Fruit (blackberry) may not mature above 8,500 feet. Tolerates dry sites.
<i>Holodiscus dumosus</i>	Mountain spirea	Native. Showy "mist" of creamy flowers in summer and tan fruit in fall. Dry, rocky exposure.
<i>Jamesia americana</i>	Mountain mockorange	Native of rocky slopes. Showy, white, waxy flowers.
<i>Juniperus sabina</i>	Savin juniper	Hardy but of slow growth above 8,500 feet. An upright spreading evergreen.
<i>Lonicera involucrata</i>	Bearberry honeysuckle	Native in moist, rich soils. Foliage glossy green. Black fruit in pairs with showy, red, leaflike bracts.
<i>Lonicera korolkowi</i>	'Zabels' blueleaf Honeysuckle	Foliage bluish green. Flowers pink and red. Fruit bright red. Tolerates shade. The similar Tatarian Honeysuckle also is hardy to at least 10,000 feet.
<i>Mahonia repens</i>	Creeping grape holly	Native, low, creeping broad-leaf evergreen. Best results when used in areas with dark mountain soils. Shade-tolerant.
<i>Potentilla fruticosa</i>	Shrubby cinquefoil	Low native shrub with bright, yellow flowers and soft, finely divided leaves. Cultivated varieties available. Useful on dry, sunny slopes.
<i>Ribes</i> spp.	Currant and gooseberry	Several native and introduced species available. Thrives best in rich soil but will tolerate dry, rocky slopes. Edible fruit.
<i>Salix</i> spp.	Willow	Among the more than 10 species of native willows hardy to 10,000 feet or more, the most common is mountain willow, <i>Salix monticola</i> , with striking yellow twigs in winter. Other species can be selected for colorful purple, black, red and orange stems. Moist soils, such as along streams or ponds.
<i>Sambucus pubens</i>	Redberried elder	Native, compact shrub with showy white flowers and scarlet berries. Berries are edible but not tasty.
<i>Shepherdia canadensis</i>	Canada buffaloberry	Low native with brownish, scaly twigs and brown-dotted scaly leaves. Red berries are edible but bitter. Shade tolerant.
<i>Sorbaria sorbifolia</i>	Ural false-spirea	Summer-flowering, creeping shrub; useful for soil erosion control. Flowers are white on stiffly upright stems. Should be cut to 6-inch stubble each spring.
<i>Sorbus scopulina</i>	Native mountain ash	Does best in moist, wooded areas. Flowers white in flat clusters. Fruit red.
<i>Syringa laciniata persica</i>	Persian lilac	Hardy over 10,000 feet. Flowers lavender in late June above 9,000 feet. Best with irrigation.
<i>Syringa vulgaris</i>	Common lilac	Similar to the Persian lilac but leaves are broader. One of the most common non-natives in the mountains.
<i>Viburnum opulus</i>	European cranberrybush	The sterile form, var. <i>roseum</i> , is the common snowball bush. The latter does not produce fruit. Best with irrigation.
<b>SHRUBS HARDY TO AT LEAST 9,000 FEET ELEVATION</b>		
<i>Acer glabrum</i>	Mountain maple	Tall native with scarlet fall color. Useful on north exposures.
<i>Betula fontinalis</i>	Water birch	Cherry-like bark. Tall shrub for moist places.
<i>Cornus stolonifera</i>	Red-osier dogwood	Grows to 9,500 feet in some areas. Colorful red stems in winter. Moist soils.
<i>Juniperus sabina</i>	Tamarix juniper	The 'Tammy' juniper of the nursery trade. Low-spreading evergreen rarely over 3 feet high unless crowded.
<i>tamariscifolia</i>		
<i>Prunus melanocarpa</i>	Chokecherry	Tall, upright native for moist locations. Black fruit is edible. The related pin cherry, <i>P. pennsylvanica</i> , has unpalatable, red fruit.
<i>Purshia tridentata</i>	Antelope brush	Low, dense shrub for dry, rocky, south slopes.
<i>Rubus</i> spp.	Raspberry	The native, <i>R. strigosus</i> , is hardy over 10,000 feet. Most garden varieties are more dependable below 9,000 feet. Useful in rocky but moist places. Tasty fruit in August.
<b>SHRUBS HARDY TO AT LEAST 8,000 FEET ELEVATION</b>		
<i>Acer ginnala</i>	Amur maple	Possibly hardy to 9,000 feet.
<i>Artemisia abrotanum</i>	Wormwood sage	Plant for dry sites. Useful as a low hedge. Many native sage species also useful.
<i>Berberis thunbergii</i>	Japanese barberry	Also available in red-leaved and dwarf forms. Thorny stems. Often slow to establish. Shade-tolerant.
<i>Chrysothamnus nauseosus</i>	Rabbitbrush	Showy, yellow flowers in late summer. Useful in poor, dry soils.
<i>Euonymus vegetus</i>	Wintercreeper euonymus	Broadleaved evergreen for north or east exposures. Should be used in good soils with consistent moisture.
<i>Juniperus communis</i>	Common juniper	Low, spreading evergreen in shaded locations. Best in rich soil.

**SHRUBS HARDY TO AT LEAST 8,000 FEET ELEVATION, continued**

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<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>	Common privet	Useful hedge. May be tender above 8,000 feet.
<i>Rhus trilobata</i>	Skunkbush sumac	Native for dry, sunny slopes. Useful for erosion control. Red fruit.
<i>Rosa harisoni</i>	Harison yellow rose	This species and the redleaf shrubrose, <i>R. rubrifolia</i> , are dependable to at least 8,500 feet. Colorful, late spring flowers.
<i>Rubus deliciosus</i>	Boulder raspberry, thimbleberry	Showy, white flowers. Fruit not tasty. Best in moist soils. Tolerates shade.
<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>	American elder	Usually freezes to ground above 8,000 feet. Flowers white. Edible, red fruit.
<i>Spiraea bumalda</i> 'Froebel'	Spirea	Lilac-colored flowers in summer. Cut to stubble in late spring. Avoid alkaline soils.
<i>Spiraea thunbergi</i>	Bridalwreath spirea	Masses of tiny, white flowers in late spring. Thin, delicate branching pattern. Best in full sun.
<i>Spiraea vanhouttei</i>	VanHoutte spirea	Old-time favorite. Shrubs have graceful, weeping habit. Probably hardy up to 9,000 feet but may suffer some winterkill.
<i>Syringa villosa</i>	Late lilac	Among the last of lilacs to bloom (July at high elevations). Flowers reddish to magenta. Variety 'MacFarland' in common usage.
<i>Viburnum lantana</i>	Wayfaringtree viburnum	Observed growing above 9,000 feet but more reliable no higher than 8,500 feet. Mature fruit resembles raisins. Foliage gray-green.

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