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NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

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of North America's
native flora*

Native Shrubs for Wildlife

Great Lakes Bioregion

by Tom Atkinson

Each shrub described here provides food or nesting comfort for wildlife. In turn, we are enriched by the visitors to these plants over the four seasons. The numbers and variety of wildlife increase in direct relation to the numbers and variety of native shrubs planted. I have observed this in my own garden, which I've been naturalizing for more than three decades.

It is easy to propagate new plants from the seeds of many of the shrubs on this information sheet.

Shrubs may be defined as “perennial plants with usually more than one low-branching woody stem.” — *Shrubs of Ontario*

Some of the shrubs described in this information sheet may also be considered trees.

Juneberry *Amelanchier species*

Juneberries, or Shadbush, are shrubs and small trees. Their beauty — smooth, grey-striped trunk, flowers, berries, and autumn colour — will turn anyone into an admirer. For those who garden in areas where the soil is not heavily acidic and blueberries are not easily cultivated, Juneberry is a great alternative. Flowers are white, on dense racemes in spring. Fruit is a juicy, blue-black berry, ripe in summer. Ranges from southern New Brunswick to Minnesota, and south to Oklahoma and northern Florida. Fall leaf colour is burgundy to scarlet red. Grows in sun or shade.



American hazelnut *Corylus americana*

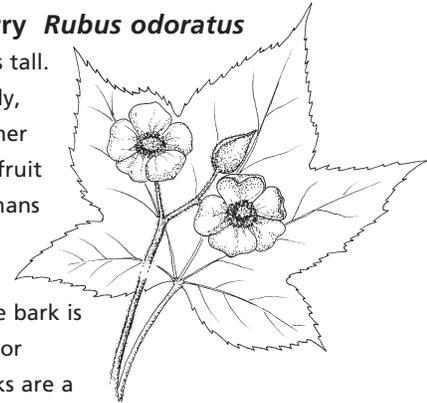
American hazelnut will never be the belle of the ball. Its strong suits are delicious nuts, favoured by humans and wildlife, beautifully understated leaf colour in autumn, and

its ability to form a hedgerow that is bountiful and thick, providing shelter for birds and other creatures. The leaves are very coarse in texture, and the shrub can attain heights of 2 to 3 metres. Flowers are catkins (male), while the female ones are in tiny clusters with red stigmas protruding. It grows from Maine and southwest Quebec to Saskatchewan, and south to Oklahoma and Georgia. Tolerates dry soil; sun or shade.

Purple-flowering raspberry *Rubus odoratus*

An erect shrub, 1 to 1.5 metres tall.

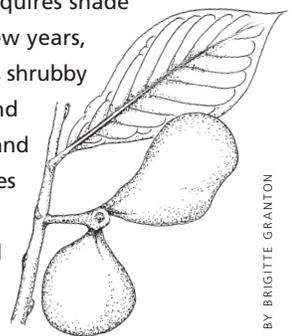
Bumblebees pollinate the lovely, rose-coloured flowers. In summer there is a large, raspberry-red fruit which is insipid in taste to humans but perhaps not to birds or squirrels. The leaf is similar to that of a sugar maple tree. The bark is cinnamon coloured, and peels or exfoliates. In winter these stalks are a



delight as they poke out of deep snowbanks. Purple-flowering raspberry favours very moist sites in nature. In a garden setting, it is not so demanding, and grows in sun or shade. It spreads via underground runners. The range is Nova Scotia to Michigan, south to Tennessee and Georgia.

Pawpaw *Asimina triloba*

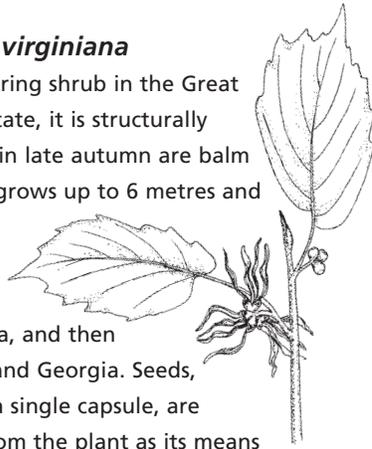
Pawpaw is a true delight, and rare when found in southern Ontario. In Indiana and southwestern Michigan it is more abundant. In the wild, it is most prevalent on moist, fertile, alluvial soil; the closer you match those conditions, the faster and more robust the growth. In youth, it requires shade to simulate its understory nature. After a few years, increased sunlight will stimulate growth. This shrubby tree can attain a height of 3 to 5 metres, and often suckers. Flowers are 3-lobed, maroon and pollinated by carrion flies. Growers sometimes will leave a dead animal in a grove of Pawpaws to increase flower pollination and fruit yield. The fruit has a custardy banana flavour (some people have a severe allergic reaction to the fruit). Autumn leaf colour is a deep, rich yellow. This is the most northern of the tropical custard apple family. Possums and squirrels adore the fruit. Get two for your garden!



Witch-hazel *Hamamelis virginiana*

Witch-hazel is the latest flowering shrub in the Great Lakes region. In its denuded state, it is structurally interesting; its yellow flowers in late autumn are balm for the soul. A large shrub, it grows up to 6 metres and spreads as much laterally. It is a plant for a larger garden.

But what a plant it is, ranging from Nova Scotia to Minnesota, and then south to Missouri, Tennessee and Georgia. Seeds, held in separate chambers in a single capsule, are literally shot several metres from the plant as its means to disperse the progeny. Grows in sun or shade.



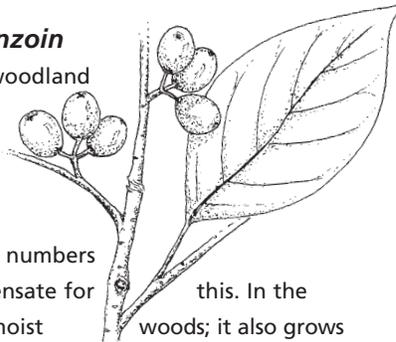
Canada elderberry *Sambucus canadensis*

This is a delightful, underused shrub. It is found throughout the southern half of the Great Lakes region, in cool, moist-to-wet situations. Its full range is Nova Scotia to southeast Manitoba and south to Oklahoma and Georgia. (*Sambucus pubens*, or red-berried elder, ranges farther north.) It grows 2 to 4 metres in height and bears many fragrant cymes of white flowers in early summer. The fruit — juicy, purple-black, berry-like drupes — is a treat for birds and squirrels in late summer. In the wild, it is found by stream banks or in river valleys. Under cultivation, it is not particular about soil, and grows in sun or shade.

Spicebush *Lindera benzoin*

To see the understorey of a woodland in spring, with spicebush all a-flower, is a sight to cherish. This shrub is one every gardener should have.

Each flower is small, but the numbers of flowers more than compensate for this. In the wild, spicebush is found in moist woods; it also grows in sunny conditions. The leaves, if rubbed, emit a pleasant fragrance. It has red berries in late summer. Spicebush is vase-shaped and can grow to 3 metres. It is a rapid grower once established. Ranges into southern Michigan and southern Ontario. Birds and squirrels eat the berries.



Black chokeberry *Aronia melanocarpa*

A low to medium-sized shrub, 2.5 metres high. Its habitat is varied: from wet woods through sandy or rocky ridges. Ranges from Newfoundland west to Minnesota, and south to northern Georgia. The flowers are white, 5-parted and are held in stalked clusters. In autumn the fruit is a purple-to-black pome (fleshy fruit). Buds are an interesting dark red, and are appressed against the twig or branch, an appealing characteristic. Leaves turn a reliable scarlet in autumn. Grows in sun or shade.

Nannyberry *Viburnum lentago*

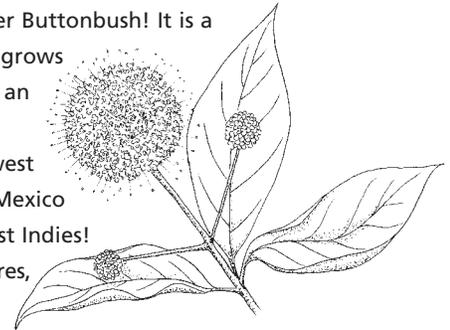
Nannyberry is a large suckering shrub, and is one of the first to flower and leaf out in spring. In a delightful act of symmetry, it is one of the last to provide leaf colour — a wonderful blend of yellow through burgundy — in late autumn. Flowers are terminal clusters, white, sweet-scented. Over the course of the summer, blue-black drupes form and ripen, and are eaten by squirrels and birds. Ranges from southwestern Quebec to southeastern Saskatchewan, and south to Colorado and Georgia. Grows in sun or shade.

Buttonbush *Cephalanthus occidentalis*

Do you have a reliably wet spot in your garden or on your property? Then consider Buttonbush! It is a

large, spreading shrub, and grows to 3 metres in height. It has an extensive range: from Nova Scotia to Minnesota, southwest to California, and south to Mexico and Florida, even in the West Indies!

The flowers are perfect spheres, whitish, consisting of many tubes. Butterflies love the flowers. The spheres metamorphose to seedheads come autumn. Birds such as Goldfinches will consume the seeds. Prefers sun.



Sumac *Rhus species*

Sumac in fall: the glory of the field and verge. Leaf colour: red, red, red! Staghorn sumac *Rhus typhina* has a velvety leaf. Smooth sumac *Rhus glabra* has a smooth leaf. Winged sumac *Rhus copallina* has shiny green leaves turning to a shining scarlet in autumn; along the leaf midrib are “wings” connecting adjacent leaflets. All Sumacs have male and female flowers borne on separate shrubs. The female ones turn a dusky red-to-burgundy in autumn. Birds and squirrels eat the fruits. A lemon-like beverage may be made from the fruit. The range of Staghorn sumac is Nova Scotia to Minnesota, and south to Iowa and North Carolina. Prefers sun.

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References

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