Viburnum

This large group of plants consists of more than 150 species and numerous named cultivars. Viburnums include deciduous and evergreen shrubs and small trees, mostly native to North America or to Asia.

The foliage ranges from glossy green to a dull, dark green, velvet appearance to foliage that is thick and leathery. Fall coloration is an attractive feature of viburnums with leaf colors ranging from a glossy red to scarlet or purple. The leaves are always arranged opposite one another on the stems. Colorful fruit contribute to fall color on many species.

The brilliant colored fruits are yellow, orange, red, pink, blue or black. In general, heavy fruit set is only reliable when at least 2 different cultivars or seedlings of the same species are planted together. The fruit is a drupe, with a fleshy coat and a hard endocarp, which contains a single seed. Viburnum flowers attract many butterflies, and the fruit clusters are popular with birds and other wildlife.

Most viburnums are dense shrubs forming a mass of green foliage, but some varieties grow as loose, open shrubs or small trees. Viburnums are relatively deer-resistant shrubs.

**Description**

Previously viburnums were included in the plant family Caprifoliaceae; however, recently they have been moved into the family Adoxaceae, along with elderberries (*Sambucus* species).

Viburnums range in height from 2 feet to 30 feet. Their flowers range from sweetly fragrant to unpleasantly scented and are primarily creamy white, but can vary from white to pink. The individual florets grow in clusters usually found at the ends of branches.
Growth Rate
Viburnums are mostly moderate- to fast-growing plants. They can grow from 1 foot to more than 2 feet per year. Compact species and cultivars may be slower growing.

Landscape Use
Viburnums are excellent hedge or screen plants, foundation shrubs or specimen plants, depending on the mature height of the selection.

Cultivation
Most viburnums grow well when planted in moist, rich and slightly acidic soil (pH 5.5 to 6.5). Incorporate organic soil conditioner at planting, so that the future root area of the planting bed contains 10 to 20 percent organic matter. Mulch the plants or bed with 4 to 6 inches of pine straw or 2 to 3 inches of bark. Plants should be spaced at least 4 to 10 feet apart, depending on the mature size of the cultivar.

As with most shrubs in the southeast, fall planting of viburnums is ideal. However, plants are often most readily available in nurseries at bloom time in the spring. Container grown plants can be planted at that time, but extra attention will need to be given to watering through the summer heat.

Many viburnums flower best in full sun, but light preferences vary from full sun to mostly shade. Many species will tolerate summer heat better if planted where they receive afternoon shade or shade during the hottest part of the day. Once established in a suitable site, most viburnums have low maintenance needs. Deep soak even well-established plants during long dry spells.

Periodically remove old and weak canes. The height and spread of most viburnums can be regulated with selective thinning pruning in early spring. If an overgrown plant needs to be renewal pruned, this should be done in the early spring. Some of the small-leaved evergreen viburnums can be sheared, but be aware that shearing will remove most flower buds and/or berries. To preserve flowers, wait to prune until just after bloom.

Problems
Although most viburnums are not seriously troubled by diseases or pests, several problems can occur, particularly when plants are stressed or in poor growing conditions.

A variety of fungal leaf spots and a bacterial leaf spot are fairly common on viburnums. Aphids, thrips, spider mites, scale, root weevils and plant parasitic nematodes can be problems, also. For further information on problems on viburnums, refer to the fact sheet HGIC 2057, Viburnum Diseases & Insect Pests.

Species & Cultivars
The genus Viburnum is immense, and choosing the right selection for your garden is not easy. Listed below are some common species and their cultivars.

Viburnum species vary considerably in where they will thrive in South Carolina. Best locations for the different species are listed as Piedmont, Central (Midlands) or Coastal Plains.

Deciduous Viburnums
Mapleleaf Viburnum (Viburnum acerifolium): Native to the mountains and upper Piedmont of South Carolina, this species grows slowly to 6 feet tall and 4 feet wide, and has dark green leaves with three lobes, like maple leaves. This species has excellent fall color with leaves turning bright pink to reddish purple in fall.

The late-spring flowers are creamy white, flat-topped clusters, up to 3 inches across. They are followed by black berries in late summer. This species tolerates deep shade and dry soil, provided it is also high in organic matter. It does best in the upper Piedmont. It grows as a spreading and colonizing shrub.
Bitchiu Viburnum (*V. bitchiuense*): This species of viburnum is closely related to the Koreanspice viburnum (*V. carlesii*), as it also has pink flower buds, and white, fragrant flowers that are held in 2- to 3-inch diameter cymes in early spring.

White, sweetly scented flowers of Bitchiu viburnum (*V. bitchiuense*), Flowers are 1 ½ to 2-inches across and held in loose clusters.
Joey Williamson, ©2014 HGIC, Clemson Extension

Bitchiu viburnum grows well in both sun or part shade and tolerates most soils as long as they are well-drained. This species grows best in the upper Piedmont of South Carolina, and may grow 8 to 10 feet tall and wide.

Fruit of bitchui viburnum (*Viburnum bitchiuense*) change from red to black at maturity. Fruit is produced sparsely.
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Bodnant Viburnum (*V. x bodnantense*): This rather open, coarse plant grows to 10 feet or more. It is grown primarily for winter bloom. Small, loose clusters of fragrant pink flowers bloom in winter but may be damaged by freezes. It grows best in the Piedmont. 'Dawn.' is the most widely available cultivar.

Bodnant viburnum (*Viburnum x bodnantense*) in bloom in late December.
Karen Russ, ©2007 HGIC, Clemson Extension
**Bracted Viburnum (V. bracteatum):** This viburnum grows 10 feet tall and 8 to 10 feet wide in an oval to rounded form. The leaves are leathery and glossy, dark green, turning bronze-yellow in fall. The malodorous flowers are creamy white, held in 5 inch wide flat clusters in late spring, and followed by blue-purple fruit in late summer. It prefers sun to part shade, is highly tolerant of heat, drought and wind, and grows best in the Piedmont.

- ‘Emerald Luster’ has exceptionally nice lustrous foliage.

**Fragrant Snowball (V. x carlcephalum):** Fragrant snowballs grow 6 to 10 feet tall and wide. The leaves are 2 to 3 inches long and grayish green, turning purple in fall. The flowers are very fragrant, long-lasting, white, 4- to 5-inch clusters that open in March to early April. Prefers full sun to part shade, and grows best in the Piedmont.

- ‘Cayuga’ is a hybrid that was created by backcrossing V. x carlcephalum with V. carlcephalum. This hybrid viburnum typically grows to 4 to 6 feet tall, but may mature to 8½ feet tall and 11 feet wide. Flower buds are pink and give way to white waxy flowers that are mildly fragrant.
- ‘Cayuga’ fruit matures to black in late summer. The foliage is highly tolerant of bacterial leaf spot and powdery mildew, and fall color is a dull orange-red.

**Koreanspice Viburnum (V. carlesii):** This species grows 4 to 8 feet tall and wide, with a dense, rounded habit. The leaves are similar to those of fragrant snowball, turning burgundy to purple in fall. The flowers are clove-scented, white, 2- to 3-inch clusters, opening in March to April. Prefers full sun to part shade, and grows best in the upper Piedmont. Fruit are red to black and mature in late summer.

**Witherod Viburnum (V. cassinoides):** Witherod is native to the mountains and upper Piedmont of South Carolina. It grows as an attractive, dense, rounded plant, 6 to 10 feet tall and is a suckering shrub. The dark green leaves turn orange-red in fall. Flat clusters of white flowers in late May to June are followed by highly ornamental mixed-color clusters of green, pink, red and blue fruits that eventually mature to black in August to October. Prefers full sun to part shade and grows best in the Piedmont.

**Arrowwood (V. dentatum):** Arrowwood is native to several areas throughout South Carolina. It is variable in size, growing 6 to 15 feet tall and as wide. The dark green, 4-inch leaves turn yellow to reddish purple in fall. Cream-colored flowers in late spring are followed by blue to blue-black fruit.
Cream-colored flowers of arrowwood viburnum (*Viburnum dentatum*) are held in 4-inch wide cymes during early May.

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This species is tolerant of a wide range of growing conditions, including high pH soils, heavy clay soils and heavy shade, but prefers well drained soil.

- 'Autumn Jazz' is vase shaped, 8 to 10 feet tall by 10 to 12 feet wide with red, yellow, orange, and burgundy fall color.
- ‘Blue Muffin’ grows to 5 to 7 feet tall and 2 to 4 feet wide. It has glossy dark green leaves and intense blue fruit.
- 'Chicago Lustre' is a 10 foot tall, upright selection with dark glossy foliage.

**Linden Viburnum (V. dilatatum):** Linden viburnum grows to 8 to 10 feet tall and not quite as wide. Growth habit is open and upright in the species. Selections are often denser. The nearly round, gray-green leaves are 2 to 5 inches in diameter. The flowers are somewhat unpleasant smelling, white clusters in late spring, followed by abundant bright red, shiny fruit from mid-fall until at least December.

Grow 2 cultivars or seedlings together for best berry set. It will grow best in partial shade and moist, but well drained soil in the Piedmont. Many cultivars are available.

- 'Asian Beauty' is an upright form to 10 feet tall with long-lasting, cherry-red fruit.
- 'Catskill' is a slow-growing, compact cultivar, growing 6 feet tall by 8 feet wide.

Chinese Snowball (*V. macrocephalum*): Chinese snowball grows to 12 to 20 feet tall with a dense, rounded form. The spectacular, 6- to 8-inch flower clusters open in March or April. The blossoms are composed entirely of large, sterile flowers that are lime green at first, changing to white. Flowers are not followed by fruit, but this species often re-
blooms in late summer or fall. Plants are heat tolerant and will grow well in most areas, but will not tolerate drought. Flowers are most abundant in full sun, but afternoon or dappled shade will help prevent summer wilting.

**Possum-Haw Viburnum (V. nudum):** Possum-haw is closely related to Witherod viburnum (V. cassinoides). It is also native to South Carolina. It is very similar in appearance and habit, but the leaves are more lustrous. Fall color varies from yellow to purple and red. It grows well throughout the state, prefers part shade, is heat tolerant and also tolerates wet soil.

- 'Winterthur' grows 6 feet tall and wide with glossy, green foliage that turns red in fall. Pink fruit matures to blue.

**European Cranberrybush (V. opulus var. opulus):** This species grows 10 to 15 feet tall and wide with arching branches. The habit is multi-stemmed and rounded. Maple-like leaves are dark green, turning yellow to red or purple in fall. The white flowers consist of 2- to 4- inch clusters of small fertile blossoms ringed with larger, sterile blossoms for a lace cap effect. They appear in mid- to late spring. Berries are bright red, and persist from fall well into winter. This species grows best in the upper Piedmont in full sun or part shade, and tolerates moist to wet soil. Many selections are available, including:

- 'Compactum' grows only 4 to 5 feet high and wide, and is extremely dense growing. It has excellent fruit set and red fall color.
- 'Roseum' is known as European or common snowball. It grows 10 to 12 feet tall with very showy flower clusters composed entirely of sterile flowers (produce no fruit). The flowers start green and change to white. It is often attacked by aphids, which distort new growth.
- American cranberrybush (V. opulus var. americanum) performs best in USDA zones 7 or cooler with moist soil conditions.

**Japanese Snowball (V. plicatum f. plicatum):** This shrub grows 8 to 15 feet tall and wide. Showy, 2-to 3-inch snowball-like clusters of white sterile flowers resemble those of V. opulus. They appear in April.
Doublefile Viburnum (*V. plicatum f. tomentosum*): Doublefile viburnum is one of the most attractive viburnums, with a spreading, horizontal branching form. In bloom it resembles the layered look of flowering dogwood. It blooms in April with 2- to 4-inch clusters of small fertile flowers edged with large, sterile flowers, giving a lace cap effect. The fruit is red, aging to black, and appears in early to mid-summer. Leaves turn reddish purple in fall. Doublefile viburnum grows best in the Piedmont, preferring moist but well drained soil, and some shade. Excessive summer heat and drought may result in leaf scorch. Many cultivars are available.

- 'Mariesii' is noted for its layered, horizontal branching and large white flower clusters.
- 'Shasta' is a broad, spreading selection. It grows 10 feet tall by 12 feet wide, with profuse, large, pure white flower clusters. Bright red fruit mature to black.

Black Haw (*V. prunifolium*): Black haw is native throughout South Carolina. It is an upright, rounded, small tree or multi-stemmed shrub to 12 to 15 feet tall and 8 to 12 feet wide. Occasionally, plants can reach 20 to 30 feet tall. Plants sucker and can form large colonies. Flowers are creamy white, in 2 to 4 inch wide clusters, opening in late March to April. Fruit starts rose pink and matures to blue-black in fall. It grows well in sun and shade, most soil types and has good heat and drought tolerance.

Tea Viburnum (*V. setigerum*): Tea viburnum is grown primarily for its spectacular berry display. Plants grow 8 to 12 feet tall in an upright, somewhat leggy form. The leaves, once used for tea, are 3 to 6 inches long, dark green, turning muted red in fall. The white flowers open in early April and are not striking, but the heavy production of scarlet fruit from September to late fall is outstanding. Plants grow best in the Piedmont, in moist but well drained soil, in full sun or partial shade.

Wright Viburnum (*V. wrightii*): The Write viburnum grows best in the Piedmont of South Carolina, has an upright habit, and reaches to 6 to 10 feet tall. This species is very similar to *V. dilatatum*, but with glabrous stems and larger leaves. White flowers are produced in 2- to 4-inch flattened cymes in the spring. Fruit are red, ovoid ½-inch long, and very showy.

**Evergreen & Semi-Evergreen Viburnums**

Awabuki Viburnum (*V. awabuki*): Awabuki viburnum grows in a strongly upright form, 15 to 20 feet tall by 10 to 15 feet wide. It has very thick, very shiny, narrow 3-to 7-inch-long by ½-to 2-inch-wide leaves with distinct teeth. Berries are bright red. It grows in sun or shade, in well drained soil. Plants have good drought resistance and make an excellent screen. It is best grown in the Midlands and Coastal Plain. Foliage may be damaged if temperatures fall below 10 °F.

- 'Chindo' has exceptional berry set.

Burkwood Viburnum (*V. x burkwoodii*): Burkwood viburnum is semi-evergreen, 8 to 10 feet tall and wide, with glossy dark green leaves that turn dark red in winter. Spicily fragrant, 2 to 3-inch
flower clusters open in March or April. They are followed by red to black fruit in July to August.

Burkwood viburnum is both heat and pollution tolerant. It prefers moist, well-drained soil in sun or part shade and grows well in most areas of the state, except for the lower Coastal Plain.

- 'Chenaultii' has a finer texture and habit, and is later-blooming than the species.
- 'Mohawk' has red buds, which are showy long before they expand into white spicy-fragrant flowers. The fall color is bright orange to red purple. This cultivar is resistant to bacterial leaf spot. It typically grows to 7 to 8 feet tall.

**David Viburnum (V. davidii):** This is an exceptionally attractive, evergreen, low-growing shrub with parallel-veined, dark blue-green, leathery leaves. It forms a dense, wide mass, 3 to 5 feet tall and 4 to 5 feet wide.

Flowers are pink budded, opening to white, non-fragrant, 2-to 3-inch clusters in April to May. Berries are bright, metallic blue, but are borne only if two separate clones of the plant are grown together. David viburnum may take cold damage if a warm winter is followed by late frosts. It is not very tolerant of high heat and is best grown in moist, but well-drained soil, in shade.

- Cinnamon-leafed viburnum (Viburnum cinnamomifolium) has very similar foliage and flowers, with dark blue berries. It grows much taller (6 to 10 feet), but is better adapted to growth in the Southeast.

**Japanese Viburnum (V. japonicum):** Plants are evergreen and grow 6 to 8 feet tall and wide. Habit is dense and rounded, with leathery, glossy green leaves. It makes a good screening plant. Flowers are fragrant and white, and berries are red. This name is sometimes mistakenly given to sweet viburnum (V. odoratissimum), a much different, larger plant. Japanese viburnum will grow throughout the state. It is adaptable to different soils and grows in part shade to shade.
**Walter's Viburnum** (*V. obovatum*): Native to the coastal plains of South Carolina, this species is hardy throughout the state. It has very dense, small, semi-evergreen, early emerging foliage and is suitable for hedging. Leaves take on a purple tint in winter. The species grows as an upright, rounded, small tree, 12 to 20 feet tall if unpruned. Flowers are in 2 inch wide clusters opening in March to April. Berries are red to shiny black. This viburnum will grow in wet to dry soils, in sun to part shade. It is drought and heat tolerant.

- 'Mrs. Schiller's Delight' is a dwarf cultivar, growing 1½ feet tall and 3 feet wide.
- 'Whorled Class' is a rounded, compact cultivar that grows to 5 feet tall and wide.

**Sweet Viburnum** (*V. odoratissimum*): Sweet viburnum is evergreen and grows in an upright form 10 to 20 feet tall. The leaves are 3 to 8 inches long and 1½ to 4 inches wide. The flowers appear in conical, 3- to 6-inch clusters and are white and lightly fragrant in mid-spring. Fruit are red and mature to purple-black. It is often confused with *V. awabuki*.

- 'Emerald Lustre' has pink tinged new growth, with lustrous green mature leaves.

**Prague Viburnum** (*V. x pragense*): This species has shiny, 2 to 4 inch long leaves on a fast growing, upright, oval shrub, growing to 10 feet tall or more. It is a good choice where a rapid growing screen is needed. Occasional pruning will help encourage density. Pink buds open to creamy white, lightly fragrant 3-to 6-inch wide, flower clusters in March to April. Fruit are red, which finally turn to a glossy black. It will grow in the Piedmont or Midlands in moist, but well-drained soil, in sun to part shade. The Prague viburnum is a hybrid between *Viburnum rhytidophyllum* and *V. utile*.

**Lantanaphyllum Viburnum** (*V. x rhytidophylloides*): This semi-evergreen to evergreen viburnum is similar in appearance to leatherleaf viburnum. It is a robust plant, growing 8 to 10 feet tall or more, with an upright, spreading habit. The dark, leathery leaves have a pronounced wooly, light gray underside. Creamy white flowers in 3 to 4 inch clusters appear in April. Red to black berries appear in late summer. Plants grow best in the Piedmont, in full sun or partial shade. This is a cross between *V. rhytidophyllum* and *V. lantana*.

- 'Alleghany' has extra dark, leathery leaves, abundant flowering and a rounded habit. It is resistant to bacterial leaf spot.
- 'Willowwood' has lustrous leaves, an arching habit, and often reblooms in fall.

**Leatherleaf Viburnum** (*V. rhytidophyllum*): This evergreen species has large, shiny, dark, leathery leaves. The growth habit is strongly upright and multi-stemmed, growing 10 to 15 feet tall. Large clusters of creamy white flowers open in April. The brownish flower buds are highly visible starting from the previous summer. Berries are uncommon, red turning to black in mid fall. The leaves droop as temperatures approach freezing. Plants grow best in the upper Piedmont, in moist but well-drained soil, in partial shade to shade. This is probably the most shade tolerant evergreen viburnum.

**Sandankwa Viburnum** (*V. suspensum*): Plants grow 6 to 12 feet high with a spreading habit and coarse, dense texture. The leaves are 2 to 5 inches long and dark, leathery green. Flowers are fragrant, white with a pink tinge in 2-to 4-inch panicles. Unlike most viburnums, it tolerates hot, dry areas and sandy soil in full sun to shade. This plant grows best in the south and eastern edges of the coastal plains. It may be severely damaged by cold winters if temperatures dip into the mid to low teens.

**Laurustinus** (*V. tinus*): Laurustinus is an upright, rounded evergreen that grows 6 to 12 feet tall, and a bit less in width. Clusters of pink buds open to slightly-fragrant, white flowers between January and early April. Fruit are ovoid, metallic blue that age to black. While the plant is hardy to 0 °F once established, leaves may suffer cold damage if temperatures dip below 10 °F. It is adaptable to soil type, provided it is well-drained and will grow in sun or shade. It is essentially pest free. Many cultivars are available.

- 'Spring Bouquet' is compact and rounded in form, reaching 5 to 6 feet in height and width. Stems are red.
- 'Variegata' has conspicuously creamy yellow variegations along the leaf margins. It is less cold hardy than the species.
The following cultivars of Japanese viburnum are semi-evergreen. When planted together, they ensure an especially heavy berry set. Both grow to 8 to 9 feet tall and wide, and are very similar in habit.

- 'Chippewa' has glossy foliage and maroon to bright red fall color. Oblong fruit are dark red. This is a hybrid between *V. japonicum* and *V. dilatatum*.
- 'Huron' has leathery matte foliage and rich red-purple fall color.

**Service Viburnum (V. utile):** This viburnum is not often grown as a species but has produced some excellent hybrids. The following cultivars are heat tolerant down to the lower Piedmont. They grow best with moist but well-drained soil and some shade.

- 'Chesapeake' is semi-evergreen, 6 feet tall and 10 feet wide with wavy-edged, leathery dark green leaves. Small white flowers open in April from pink buds and are followed by limited black fruit. This is a cross of ‘Cayuga’ and *V. utile*.
- 'Conoy' is a dense, evergreen with a spreading form to 5 feet tall and 8 feet wide. Pink buds open to white flowers in April. Leaves often turn purple in winter. This is a cross of *V. utile* and *V. burkwoodii* ‘Park Farm Hybrid’.
- 'Eskimo' is semi-evergreen. It has a dense, compact form, growing 8 to 10 feet tall and wide. The flowers are pure white, in 3-to 4-inch round snowball type clusters. Unfortunately, the flowers have no fragrance. It flowers a bit later than 'Chesapeake'. ‘Eskimo’ is a hybrid between *V. x carlecephalum* ‘Cayuga’ and *V. utile*.

**Viburnum Species Identification**

An excellent web site from Cornell University for identification of viburnum species is: [http://www.hort.cornell.edu/vlb/key/index.html](http://www.hort.cornell.edu/vlb/key/index.html)


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