

# Short Trees and Tall Shrubs

By Steve Chaney, CEA-Horticulture

When you are planting trees and shrubs, do not forget the tall shrubs and small trees. We always remember the shade trees (live oaks, Texas red oak, cedar elm, bur oak, chinquapin oak, and Chinese Pistache). Foundation shrubs such as dwarf yaupon holly, compact nandina, and dwarf Burford holly are very popular for the area directly in front of the house. It is the vertical space in between the two extremes that is often neglected. The mid-level plants join the small and large plants into a unified landscape. They are especially important for wildlife if that is one of your interests. The majority of birds need small trees and large shrubs for nesting cover and sources of food.



For full sun, vitex (above left) and desert willow (above right) are the most drought resistant selections. Vitex blooms with lilac-like flowers all summer as a single or multi-stem tree 20 feet tall. Desert willow reaches about the same height to form an airy tree with orchid-like blooms all summer. The selection “Bubba,” discovered by Paul Cox, has superior purple blooms. Both trees attract butterflies and hummingbirds.



Yaupon holly (shown left) can also tolerate some shade. It can be pruned to form a single-trunk tree to 25 feet tall or a multi-stemmed hedge plant or espalier tree 8 feet tall. Fit the standard yaupon into whatever space is available. The off-white blooms in spring are attractive but the red winter berries are the major attraction of the standard yaupon. The mockingbirds, waxwings, and other songbirds eat them by early spring. Yaupon is ever-green.

Mexican Plum (adjacent) is another great tree as well for planting at the edge of large trees or in the full blazing sun. It is another of the 20-25 foot trees that can tolerate some shade. The dark green leaves are deciduous and early in the season the tree is covered in beautiful white blossoms that are truly fragrant. The bark is dark, almost purple with small ornamental plums that are edible.



(Continued on page 2)

## Short Trees and Tall Shrubs (cont'd)

---

Redbud is another good tree for planting at the edge of large shade trees. It is another 25-foot tree that can tolerate some shade. The heart-shaped leaves are deciduous. In early spring, before the leaves are back, its pink blooms cover the stems. Plant the Texas, Oklahoma, or Mexican selections for best drought tolerance.

There are a number of large shrubs from which to choose. Avoid the red-tipped photinia. It is becoming short-lived in the DFW metro area because of chlorosis and an untreatable fungal leaf spot.

Hollies and nandinas are good choices. They are good xeriscape plants, are evergreen, tolerate sun or shade, and produce berries that are eaten by songbirds. The standard nandina produces colorful winter foliage if it is grown in the sun. The standard Burford holly is probably the best of the large hollies for DFW. The nandina reaches 7 feet tall and the Burford holly reaches about 8 feet tall.



I planted three types of viburnum:

*Spring*                      *Sweet*                      *Sandankwa*  
*Bouquet*                      *Viburnum*                      *Viburnum*

These viburnums generally do well in the shade. One species, rusty blackhaw, prefers full sun where it has good fall color.

Of the trees and shrubs listed in this article, vitex, desert willow, yaupon holly, nandina, and wax myrtle do not seem to be eaten

much by the deer. In some neighborhoods they also pass up pittosporum.

Take a few moments as you drive through your neighborhood to observe what plants are doing well in your area. Take the time to talk to some of your local nurseries about plants that do well in your area. Visit your local Botanic Garden or Arboretum to find the plants that have tested well in your area. These steps will greatly enhance your landscape if taken before planting, rather than after. Enjoy the Garden and enjoy life, it's always best if you enjoy life in the garden!