

Garden exhibit shows what to plant in Transylvania

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When you are wandering through local garden centers to choose new plants for your garden, how do you know what will thrive here in Transylvania County? The master gardeners have an exhibition bed in the demonstration gardens behind the Silvermont Mansion in Brevard that suggests what not to plant and offers several better alternatives.

FLOWERING SHRUBS

As an example of what not to plant, there are four shrubs that are weedy, invasive or poisonous to wildlife: Avoid privet, thorny olive, autumn olive and nandina. Although their flowers smell good and their berries look inviting, gardeners soon find they take over the landscape. Privets (*Ligustrum japonica*, *lucidum*, and *sinense*) have often been used as hedges but in our area they develop thickets that crowd out native plants nurturing pollinators. In addition, birds devour even the seeds of toxic nandina, spreading them in their droppings.

Instead, enjoy the spring flowers, colorful fall leaves, and winter berries of these seven plants: fothergilla, inkberry holly, ninebark, New Jersey tea, winterberry holly, dog hobble and fragrant sumac. They are native to our area and will thrive much better in your garden while providing desirable habitat for insects

and birds. Dwarf specimens of these plants are on display at Silvermont, including dwarf fothergilla or bottlebrush (*Fothergilla x intermedia* 'legend of the small'), a deciduous flowering shrub that is shade tolerant (four hours of sun) and deer resistant. Use it as an edging plant; part of a mixed border; in a mass planting; or as a focal point in your landscape.

Shrubs that require part sun to full sun include inkberry holly (*Ilex glabra* 'gem box'), winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillate* 'little goblin red' and 'little goblin guy'), and New Jersey tea (*ceanothus americanus*). Note that both male and female inkberry plants are needed to produce its dark berries, so plant the male 'squeeze-box' nearby. That's also true for the brilliant red fruits on winterberry—get both the varieties named above. New Jersey tea is deliciously fragrant and beloved by pollinators but you will need to protect young shrubs from deer and rabbits.

Alternatively, give ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius* 'tiny wine') full sun (6+ hours a day) to maximize its brilliant bronze-maroon foliage and pink and white spring flowers. It will enhance the middle of your border or the broader landscape. However, if you need a broadleaf evergreen that can take full sun to part shade and that will thrive in moist soil, consider dog hobble (*Leu-*



Submitted photo

Master gardeners Paco Candal and Betsy Bond planting new native shrubs in the 'Plant This Not That Garden' at Silvermont.

cothoe fontenasiana). It will grow to 3-6 feet high, producing fragrant white flowers in spring and beautiful color in the fall if it gets enough sun. It's a valuable plant in the natural or woodland garden, a pollinator garden, and as a provider of winter interest in a border. Keep in mind, though, that dog hobble is poisonous to humans, dogs, cats, and horses.

For a low-growing groundcover, fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica* 'gro-low') is a delightful, low maintenance choice. Fragrant sumac will cover a big area. It's deciduous; its yellowish spring flowers are not as attention-getting as its bright red berries in fall and winter. This sumac is not picky: it will take full sun to part shade, and once established, can tolerate

moist to dry soils.

ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

The Silvermont garden offers an excellent alternative to maiden grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*), which is a popular but very aggressive grower that quickly crowds its neighbors and is extremely difficult to dig out. In dry areas it can be a fire hazard. Little blue stem grass

(*Schizachyrium scoparium* 'prairie blues') is much more manageable. It grows to about 3 feet, its blue leaves turning copper, brown and crimson in the fall and winter. These leaves provide habitat for butterflies and other good insects; songbirds feed on its white seedheads.

The Silvermont Demonstration Gardens are maintained by master gardener volunteers from the NC State Extension Master Gardener Program. They feature not only "Plant This Not That" suggestions, but also examples of pollinator, vegetable, herb and woodland gardens, as well as a composting station. They are located behind the Silvermont Mansion at 364 E Main St. and are open to the public daily from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Also visit the other demonstration gardens in the county: The Library Rain Gardens, located on the grounds of the Transylvania County Public Library at 212 S. Gaston St. in Brevard; the Allison-Deaver House Medicinal and Culinary Herb Gardens located at 2753 Asheville Highway in Brevard; and the gardens at the Pisgah National Forest Ranger Station, located at 1600 Pisgah Highway (U.S. 276) in Pisgah Forest. For questions, please contact transylvania.ces.ncsu.edu or call (828) 884-3142.

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