

Shrubs Worth the Extra Effort



When selecting shrubs for a garden in the Kansas City area, the gardener is always encouraged to select a shrub that is hardy for a Zone 6a climate, will grow in our predominantly heavy clay soils, and that can survive our cold, usually dry winters. However, some shrubs are not well adapted to such conditions, but they are so beautiful or desirable that they are worthy of some extra effort in order to make them grow. These shrubs may require the gardener to manipulate or create a *microclimate*, which is a set of conditions different from those of the surrounding area. The gardener can create “just the right spot” — the microclimate — by manipulating soil texture, pH, drainage or fertility.

Before creating the needed microclimate for a shrub, look around — it may already exist within your garden. For example, gardens with southern or western exposures are warmer than gardens with a northern exposure. A naturally moist area or a sunny or shady spot may be just the right location for a shrub with special needs.

The following list contains a few shrubs you may want to consider.

Size	Culture	Description
ABELIA <i>Abelia x grandiflora</i>		
Height: 3-6' Spread: 3-6'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefers moist, acid, well-drained soil • Full sun to half shade • Plant on a southern exposure • May die back to the ground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glossy, evergreen shrub with white flowers in the summer
AZALEA (deciduous) <i>Rhododendron</i> ‘Exbury Hybrids’ R. ‘Northern Lights Hybrids’		
Height: 3-4' Spread: 3-4'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform best in locations with morning sun • Requires acid soil and good drainage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Exbury’ varieties are upright growers with yellow, orange and red fall foliage • ‘Northern Lights’ are varieties more compact and extremely hardy
AZALEA (evergreen) <i>Rhododendron</i> ‘Girard Hybrids’ R. ‘Kurume Hybrids’		
Height: 2-4' Spread: 2-4'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be planted on the north or east side for protection from hot winds • Requires acid soil and good drainage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Girard’ varieties very hardy with large flowers • ‘Kurume’ varieties are hardy and semi-dwarf

Size	Culture	Description
BEARBERRY <i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>		
Height: 6-12" Spread: 2-4'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes difficult to transplant • Does best in poor, sandy, infertile soil • Morning sun or shade • Requires pH 4.5-5.5 • Never fertilize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outstanding ground cover but MUST have good bed preparation • Evergreen
CRAPEMYRTLE <i>Lagerstroemia indica</i>		
Height: 2-3' Spread: 3-4'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-drained soil • Full sun • Prune to near ground level in winter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large flowers in September • Emerges late in spring
DAPHNE <i>Daphne x burkwoodi</i> 'Carol Mackie'		
Height: 2-3' Spread: 2-3'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires good soil that is moist and well-drained • Light shade • Protect from winter winds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadleaf evergreen with green/cream variegated leaves • <i>Fantastically fragrant!</i>
HEAVENLY BAMBOO <i>Nandina domestica</i>		
Height: 2-6' Spread: 1-4'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptable • Prefers moist, fertile soil • Full sun or shade • Zone 6 plant — may die back to ground — plant in a warm area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine textured foliage remains evergreen with brilliant red berries in winter
LESPEDEZA <i>Lespedeza thunbergii</i> 'Gibraltar'		
Height: 3-6' Spread: 3-6'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-drained soil • pH adaptable • Do not fertilize • Grows in full sun • Prune to 6" in early spring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bluish-green foliage covered with rose-purple flowers in late summer
PIERIS <i>Pieris japonica</i>		
Height: 3-6' Spread: 3-4'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow in moist, acid, well-drained soil • Grow in part shade • Water well first year and during dry periods • Shelter from wind • Mulching is essential as plants are shallow-rooted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent specimen plant • New foliage is more showy than flowers on some cultivars • Bell-shaped flowers emerge in early spring
REDVEIN ENKIANTHUS <i>Enkianthus campanulatus</i>		
Height: 6-8' Spread: 4-5'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have acid soil (pH of below 6) • Grows in partial shade • Requires adequate moisture • Zones 4-7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow, upright growth habit with layered branches and tufted foliage • Excellent fall color • Blooms May – June • Combines well with rhododendrons