

Q. We recently did an addition to our house which was great, but we lost some shrubbery. Is this the right time to plant replacements, and what would be a couple of good choices for this area? Also, please advise us about some good practices for maintaining healthy shrubs. Tom & Judy Fort.

The Garden Bench, a research-based horticultural newsletter, points out that November is the best time to plant shrubs and suggests that camellias are a good choice. They provide colorful blooms as cooler weather arrives. On his web site, Walter Reeves says that *Camellia japonica* is a popular camellia and will grow up to 15 feet; if a smaller, more refined choice is desired, *Camellia sasangua* will usually only reach 6 to 10 feet. The flowers and leaves are also smaller. However, choosing one variety might be difficult since there are over 200 camellias, and by choosing varying species a garden can show beautiful blooms through most of the winter months. *Samantha camellia*, for example, is a *Camellia reticulata* with well-defined veins. This group is also known for large blooms described as saucer to dinner plate sizes. Many varieties of camellias will tolerate full sun and even drought, but better conditions will result in more beautiful plants and prolific blooms.

Bob Westerfield, a UGA horticulturist, recommends the anise tree, *Illicium anisatum*, which is really a shrub but is underrated in our landscapes. However, he gives it a high rating because it has characteristics that are desirable to most home gardeners; it should be planted in fall or early spring. It is tough; it can flourish in moist or dry sites, and it will survive in sun or some shade. *Illicium* usually blooms in late spring and will continue through early summer. Also, it is very adaptable to almost anywhere in the landscape, but it will need some space to spread out. It can reach 8 feet in width and 10 feet in height. It will function well as a foundation shrub for a house; and if pruning is not your favorite activity, this could be a good choice. Mr. Westerfield says that the anise tree looks best when left to grow naturally, but if pruning is necessary, do it in late winter. One benefit of pruning this shrub is enjoying the pleasant licorice smell of the leaves when doing your work. There are three varieties that could be used in a landscape as a specimen planting or in a grouping to make an interesting textured background for smaller plants. *Illicium henryi*, Henry Anise tree, is a compact dense form. Two other interesting varieties are *Illicium parviflorum*, small Anise tree, and *Illicium Anisatum*, Japanese Anise tree.

There are a plethora of shrubs from which to choose; seek out a good chart that will furnish sizes and growing conditions of shrubs for this area. Visit well established nurseries and look for plants that will complement the style and design of your home.

Caring for shrubs has about the same regime as most any plant; first, know your plant. For example, Walter Reeves and Erica Glasener in their excellent book, Gardening in Georgia, advise that the *Hydrangea macrophylla*, bigleaf hydrangea, blooms on second year wood; so, pruning in winter or early spring might mean that you would be cutting off blooms for the coming season. On the other hand, *Hydrangea paniculata*, panicle hydrangea, produces blooms on new growth; so, early spring pruning is desirable before the shrub begins vigorous growth. A good general resource about pruning is “Basic Principles of Pruning Woody Ornamentals” which can be viewed on line at -

<http://pubs.caes.uga.edu/caespubs/pubs/pdf/B949.pdf>

Another maintenance chore for shrubs in Georgia is pest control. Any experienced gardener will advise choosing healthy plants before putting them in your site. Then keep up a good working relationship making sure that your shrubs have good air movement, plenty of water, and the right amount of light. Examine all your plants on a regular basis for pests, and in the Gardening in Georgia book, Reeves and Glasener urge their readers to practice Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Use organic control methods if possible; only resort to chemicals if absolutely necessary.

In addition to knowing your plant, you should also know your soil. Since you indicate that you had well established plants in the site, you have probably not had a soil test for several years. It would be wise to spend the \$9.00 to have one done; this can save more than the fee because you will know exactly what you need to supplement the soil in that area. Call the UGA Extension office at 770-836-8546 and ask for help if you have not done a test before. While you are shopping and your site is rather bare, one step that is almost always needed is adding organic matter. Start by spreading 3 to 4 inches over the area and till to a depth of at least a foot. Then keep the tilled area covered with a mulch to discourage grass from invading before you can get your shrubs in the ground. When you do your new planting, investigate a starter fertilizer which has a high percentage of phosphorus to establish roots quickly. After your new plants are established, keep a close watch on them; if they are vigorous, you probably will not need to fertilize. However, if you notice pale leaves and a lack of vigor, you can fertilize three times a year. As always, read and follow directions carefully to apply the correct amounts at the appropriate intervals.

Good luck with your project, and you would be welcome to join us at the regular monthly meetings on the second Thursday of each month at 6:00pm for dinner; bring a dish to share. Or attend the program at approximately 7:00pm the same evening to learn more about horticulture in West Georgia. We meet at the Agriculture Center located at 900 Newnan Road in Carrollton. For more information or answers to any of your gardening questions, contact a

Carroll County Master Gardener Extension Volunteer at 770-836-8546, via e-mail at ccmg@uga.edu or visit our office in the Ag Center at 900 Newnan Road in Carrollton.