



*Abelia* × *grandiflora*  
'Rose Creek'



# Superstar Shrubs

In smaller gardens, where space is at a premium, these compact evergreen shrubs with vibrant flowers and foliage add four-season interest.

BY PATRICIA A. TAYLOR



*Callistemon viminalis* 'Little John'

**L**OW-GROWING evergreen shrubs have always been prized by gardeners and landscape designers for their neatness, ease of maintenance, and year-round interest. Add attributes such as colorful flowers and, in some cases, equally colorful foliage, and these plants become even more valuable, especially in the smaller scale urban and suburban landscapes that many of us care for these days.

Fortunately for today's gardeners, plant breeders and nursery owners have introduced scads of flowering shrubs that are

both compact, evergreen, and—equally important—easy care. Some are repeat bloomers, others are compact versions of long flowering plants or burnish the flower power of plants that already had handsome foliage. All make good specimens, container plants, and even low hedges.

In this article I'm covering 13 of these plants you may wish to add to your gardens. I have further restricted the pool of candidates by focusing on selections that generally get no larger than three feet tall and wide, so most are also well suited for planters if your "garden" happens to be a

patio or balcony. One or two will grow larger, but may be kept compact with pruning.

Given all these choices, I'm confident that no matter where you live—from the tundra of northern Minnesota, to the sultry shores of southern Florida and the sere heat of the Southwest and southern California—you'll find at least one plant to grow, admire, and enjoy year-round. 🌿

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*A regular contributor to The American Gardener, Patricia A. Taylor lives in Princeton, New Jersey.*





*Andromeda polifolia* 'Blue Ice'

### 'Little Richard' Glossy Abelia

(*A. ×grandiflora*, USDA Zones 6–8)

A 2022 Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS) Gold Medal Winner, this mounded shrub has orange-pink to bronze winter foliage and long blooming white summer flowers. It is ideal for a site with morning sun, but will tolerate full sun in the northern part of its hardiness range. Another excellent abelia selection is 'Rose Creek', which has red-tinted white flowers and purple-hued winter foliage.

### 'Blue Ice' Bog Rosemary

(*Andromeda polifolia*, Zones 2–6)

Dangling clusters of pinkish-white flowers in spring and needlelike foliage that turns icy blue in winter are the draws for this selection of a diminutive shrub native to sub-Arctic regions of Europe, Asia, and North America. It thrives in cool climate regions in sun to part shade and a site with dependably moist, neutral to acidic soil.

### 'Little John' Weeping Bottlebrush

(*Callistemon viminalis*, Zones 9–11)

The bright red bottlebrush flowers, which can bloom off and on from December through July, depending on region, are hummingbird magnets. Weeping, needlelike foliage is an attractive bluish green color. A compact selection of a species native to Australia, it thrives in full sun to part shade and average soil.

### 'Shishi Gashira' Sasanqua Camellia

(*Camellia sasanqua*, Zones 8–10)

Hot-pink, double flowers with yellow centers bloom from mid-fall through midwinter on this low-growing camellia that has glossy, dark green foliage. It is ideal for a container or a site in part sun or dappled shade with free draining soil and protection from winter winds. Some sources list the name as 'Shishigashira'.

### 'Golden Starlet' Winter Heath

(*Erica carnea*, Zones 4/5–7)

This selection of a heath native to southern and central Europe provides a year-round interest from foliage and flowers. During summer months, the leaves are almost golden-colored. With the approach of fall, they acquire lime-green accents, and from winter into early spring they are covered in snowy white flowers. Forms a groundcover in a rock garden or site



*Camellia sasanqua* 'Shishi Gashira'





*Erica carnea*  
'Golden Starlet'

with full sun with moist, well-drained, acidic soil.

**'Swamp Hobbit' Florida Anise**

(*Illicium floridanum*, Zones 6–9)

This relatively new selection of Florida anise is low growing with rich, glossy green leaves and bright red flowers with straplike petals in mid spring. The scent of the flowers and foliage is variously described as strange, pungent, or stinky,



*Kalmia latifolia* 'Elf'

which may help explain why the plant is said to be deer-resistant. A selection of a Southeast native, it is suited to part or full shade in moist, loamy, acidic soils.

**'Elf' Mountain Laurel**

(*Kalmia latifolia*, Zones 5–9)

A dwarf selection of our lovely northeastern native mountain laurel bears terminal clusters of pink to white flowers in late spring to early summer that complement its rich

green foliage. Plant in part sun to near full shade in moist, organic-rich, acidic soil.

**Scarletta® Dog Hobble**

(*Leucothoe fontanesiana* 'Zeblid', Zones 5–8)

Prized for its foliage colors—bright red new spring growth; glossy, deep green summer displays; burgundy-red fall colors changing to bronze to purple-red winter shows. All this and white spring



*Leucothoe fontanesiana* 'Zeblid'

TOP LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK. TOP RIGHT: BILL JOHNSON. BOTTOM: JANET DAVIS





*Loropetalum chinense* var. *rubrum*  
'Peack'



*Pieris japonica*  
'Prelude'

flowers. Provide site with afternoon shade or dappled sun, in moist, acidic, organic soil.

**Purple Pixie™ Chinese Fringeflower**  
(*Loropetalum chinense* var. *rubrum*  
'Peack', Zones 7–9)

The deep purple-colored foliage on this selection is covered in late spring to early summer by clusters of fragrant pink flowers. Can be used as a groundcover or grown as a container or specimen plant in full sun to part shade. This selection of an eastern Asian native grows to two feet tall and five wide.

**'Prelude' Pieris**  
(*Pieris japonica*, Zones 5–8)

This selection's emerging foliage is light pink; pink buds open to cascades of white flowers; older foliage is very dark green. Grow in sun to part shade. Another good option is 'Cavatine', whose bright red emerging spring foliage is soon blanketed with creamy white fragrant flowers.

**'Ballerina' Indian Hawthorn**  
(*Rhaphiolepis indica*, Zones 8–10)

Prized for its clusters of fragrant pink flowers, which bloom in late winter to early spring, this compact selection also

offers rosy-tinted foliage in autumn and winter. Clusters of black fruits may add fall interest. Plant in full sun in the cooler parts of its range; provide part shade elsewhere. Selection of species native to southeastern Asia.

**'Yaku Fairy' Keiskei Rhododendron**  
(*Rhododendron keiskei*, Zones 5–7)

An old-time favorite, 'Yaku Fairy' earned an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society in 1970. Forms a dense, prostrate shrub with dark green foliage that is covered with pale yellow flowers in spring. Suited to moist, acidic, loamy soils in sun to part shade, this is a selection of a variety found only on the island of Yaku, Japan.

**David Viburnum**  
(*Viburnum davidii*, Zones 7/8–9)

In addition to glossy, bluish-green foliage year round, this mound-shaped shrub native to western China offers white spring flowers and clusters of metallic blue berries in fall. Best in part to dappled shade with moist, acidic, free-draining soil. Author Michael Dirr posits that it is perhaps best suited to the Pacific Northwest; some defoliation may occur in colder areas of Zone 7. Plant at least two specimens to enhance fruit set.





*Rhododendron keiskei* 'Yaku Fairy'

## Sources

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(Wholesale nursery offers links to retail nursery sources.)

**Nurseries Caroliniana,**  
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## Resources

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*Rhapsaloe indica* 'Ballerina'