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# A New Hampshire Plant Palette

Despite their challenging plant growing climate, New Hampshire gardens could easily reflect a greater variety of landscape plants. As dependable and useful as many of our old standards may be, the quest for plants that are lesser known, under used, and often not fully appreciated is a worthwhile pursuit in a region where plant choices are limited.

The trees and shrubs described below are grouped by landscape function and are generally well suited for many New Hampshire sites. These plants were selected for multi- or extended season appeal, reduced maintenance, minimal pest problems, and good winter hardiness, as based on this author's experience. Although no hardiness ratings are given, listings can be readily found in numerous references. Treat hardiness ratings only as a guide and not as a guarantee of survival.

## **Shade and Ornamental Trees**

### **River Birch, *Betula nigra***

The most interesting characteristic of the native river birch is its salmon-colored bark that peels off in paper-thin layers. The tree is noted for its ability to grow in wet soils, but it will grow in drier situations as well. Although the river birch has been greatly ignored in favor of the showier white birches, it is a fine ornamental and should be more widely planted. It is far more resistant to insects than the white birches. 'Heritage' is a highly recommended cultivar (40 to 70 feet in height; 40 to 60 foot spread).

### **Eastern Redbud, *Cercis canadensis***

An understory tree native to areas south of New Hampshire, the eastern redbud is noted for its early, abundant, rosy pink flowers and graceful, upright habit. The large, heart-shaped leaves emerge as reddish-purple and gradually change to a lustrous dark green. The foliage turns a mediocre yellow in the fall and usually drops quickly. Clusters of dark-brown pods may persist through the winter. The tree is best used as a specimen, planted in masses, or naturalized at the woods edge. It is generally hardy in central and southern New Hampshire and tolerant of a wide range of soils. Buy plants propagated from northern seed sources and avoid the frequently less hardy cultivars which are available in white and true pink (10-20 feet height; 15-20 foot spread).

### **Star Magnolia, *Magnolia stellata***

Hardy throughout New Hampshire, the star magnolia forms a dense, mounded, large shrub or small tree reaching 20 feet. The large, white, star-like flowers appear in early April before the foliage emerges, even on young plants. This trouble-free magnolia has effective, dark green foliage that turns to a nondescript leathery brown in the fall. Winter exposes an attractive smooth gray bark. Best used as a specimen or in small groups.

**Sargent Cherry, *Prunus sargentii***

One of the largest and hardiest of the cherries, this medium-sized shade tree reaches 40 feet and features showy, deep pink blooms followed by lustrous green foliage. The round-headed crown sports bronze to reddish fall foliage, and the trunk is a polished, chestnut brown bark. A narrow, columnar variety, 'Columnaris,' is also available. Sargent Cherry is one of the better *Prunus* species for New Hampshire where the choice of cherries is often limited.

**Korean Mountainash, *Sorbus alnifolia***

Generally superior to its more commonly planted European cousin, this medium-sized, pyramidal to broad-oval shade tree offers white flowers and glossy green, beech-like foliage which turns yellow, orange and golden brown in the fall. The persistent, brilliant red fruits offer food for birds and complement the fall foliage display. A better park than street tree, this plant is definitely one of the best of the mountainash.

**Japanese Stewartia, *Stewartia pseudocamellia***

Not well known or widely available, this slow-growing, 20 to 40 foot, upright oval tree is possibly one of the best small trees for the garden. Surprisingly hardy, the showy white flowers are accented by orange anthers and occur over a three-week period in July. The dark green leaves may turn yellow to dark reddish purple in the fall. The bark is first rate for winter effect, developing a mottled, peeling character.

**Japanese Tree Lilac, *Syringa reticulata***

The Japanese tree lilac is a tough, adaptable, trouble-free small tree with a rounded to spreading growth habit. It is noted for its large, showy, creamy white clusters of flowers which appear in mid-June, about three to four weeks after the common lilac has bloomed. The dark green foliage may turn a translucent yellow in the fall and is not overwhelming. The shiny, reddish brown, cherry-like bark which develops on the trunk and larger branches add winter interest. This lilac tolerates a wide range of growing conditions and is recommended for street tree use (20-30 feet height; 15-25 foot spread).

**Evergreen Trees****White Fir, *Abies concolor***

The white fir is similar to the Colorado blue spruce in color and form, but has a softer, less stiff look. Nearly pest-free, white fir better tolerates city conditions and is fairly resistant to heat and drought (30 to 50 feet height; 15 to 30 foot spread).

**Korean Fir, *Abies koreana***

This narrow, slow-growing fir is noted for its fine, blue-green foliage, compact habit, and bluish-purple cones. The Korean fir reaches a mature height of 35 feet and performs well in the cool climate of New Hampshire.

**Black Hills Spruce, *Picea glauca* 'Densata'**

Black Hills spruce, a slow-growing, compact variety of the native white spruce, is one of the hardiest of the spruces. Its dense, green to bluish green foliage is its most ornamental characteristic. Its mature size of 20-25 feet and picturesque habit make it useful for smaller landscapes.

**Serbian Spruce, *Picea omorika***

A great choice for a limited space, this densely narrow evergreen is noted for its distinctive fishhook branching and refined habit. Although fairly adaptable as to site, this spruce does best on well-drained, moist soils with winter protection from strong winds (50 to 60 feet height; 20 to 25 foot spread).

**Bristlecone Pine, *Pinus aristata***

One of the world's oldest living plants, the bristlecone pine is becoming popular for landscaping because of its dense, short needles and picturesque growth habit. Probably never destined to be a mainstream commodity, this surprisingly hardy and tough plant can make an intriguing, bonsai-like focal point for a private patio or meditative garden. It is very slow growing and tolerates hot, dry exposures, but cannot abide shade (8 to 20 feet height; spread: irregular).

**Swiss Stone Pine, *Pinus cembra***

This slow-growing pine has a dense, pyramidal habit of growth in youth and becomes more open and spreading with age. The Swiss stone pine is similar to the eastern white pine in color and texture and prefers slightly acid, well-drained soils and open sites (30 to 40 feet height; 15 to 25 foot spread).

**Carolina Hemlock, *Tsuga caroliniana***

Lesser known than our native Canadian hemlock, the Carolina hemlock is more tolerant of city conditions. Although somewhat less graceful, this tree is more compact, deeper green, and slower growing and should be considered as an alternative to, but not as a substitute for, the Canadian hemlock (45 to 60 feet height; 20 to 25 foot spread). Susceptible to hemlock woolly adelgid, as is the Canadian hemlock.

**Deciduous Shrubs****Red Chokecherry, *Aronia arbutifolia***

A dependable plant on almost any soil, red chokeberry is a medium-sized, multi-stemmed shrub with a distinctively upright growth habit. Even though the plant suckers and spreads, it can become open and leggy at the base. Small, unspectacular white to reddish flowers appear in late May. However, the summer foliage is an effective shiny green, which turns crimson to reddish purple in fall and is usually spectacular, as are the abundant, persistent, small red fruits. The cultivar 'Brilliantissima' offers lustrous, almost waxy, dark green foliage, consistent scarlet fall color, glossier red fruit, and better growth habit (6 to 10 feet height; 3 to 5 foot spread).

**Winterberry, *Ilex verticillata***

Winterberry is grown primarily for its bright red, berrylike fruit that appear while the leaves are still green and remain on the plant long after the leaves have fallen. The inconspicuous flowers are borne separately on male and female plants. Only female plants produce fruit, but both sexes need to be present to ensure fruit production. One male plant is sufficient to pollinate several females. Winterberry will grow in any good garden soil. Many cultivars are available. 'Red Sprite' is a compact, 3-foot form with superior winter fruit (6 to 10 feet height; 6 to 10 foot spread).

**Cornell Pink Rhododendron, *Rhododendron mucronulatum* 'Cornell Pink'**

One of the first rhododendrons to bloom, the true pink flowers appear on naked stems and provide a welcome harbinger of spring. This medium-sized, compact shrub is nearly rounded in outline and has soft green summer foliage which changes to shades of yellow and bronzy crimson in the fall. Winter habit is clean and neat (4 to 8 feet height with a similar spread).

**Northern Lights Hybrid Azaleas, *Rhododendron* ‘Northern Lights’**

Hardy to - 40 degrees F., this group of deciduous, early blooming rhododendrons are generally medium-sized and compact. Named selections are available which flower in white, yellow, orange, or light to deep rosy pink. Because ‘Northern Lights’ tend to be susceptible to powdery mildew, growers must pay attention to site selection and cultural conditions, including good air circulation, low humidity, and proper sanitation. Nonetheless, this group of especially hardy shrubs offers excellent choices when the selection of rhododendrons is limited.

**Royal Azalea, *Rhododendron schlippenbachii***

This attractive azalea has large, fragrant, rose-pink flowers and is considered to be one of the best. The distinctively arranged, dark green foliage changes to shades of yellow, orange, and crimson in the fall (6 to 8 feet high with similar spread).

**Hobblebush, *Viburnum alnifolium***

A native plant best used for naturalizing, hobblebush does have several ornamental qualities of merit. The large, white, flat-topped flower clusters are one of the showiest of any native woody plant. The clean green, deeply impressed foliage becomes an attractive deep red, maroon, or rose-gold in the fall. This leggy, somewhat open plant appears to be hobbling around on its knees and elbows and is most effective when faced with greenery or a stone wall. Hobblebush does best in light shade on the edge of moist, deciduous woods (6 feet high; spread: variable).

**Koreanspice Viburnum, *Viburnum carlesii***

A small shrub growing from 6 to 8 feet tall. the early, semi-snowball type white flower clusters are pink in bud and are very pleasantly fragrant. The cultivar ‘Compactum’ is a preferred selection that matures at about 4 feet and is attractive year round. The attractive green foliage turns a more consistent red to maroon bronze in the fall than the other species and then drops to reveal a clean winter habit.

**Witherod Viburnum, *Viburnum cassinoides***

A native viburnum, this plant fits in well with the New Hampshire landscape. The creamy white flower clusters produce a fruiting display that changes in color from green to nearly white and then to pink, rose, blue, and finally, black. Although the fruits are quickly enjoyed by birds, all stages are often present together on the same fruiting cluster. The foliage is a shiny rich green and turns a brilliant and dependable red in the fall. Like most viburnums, its clean winter habit is an asset in the winter landscape.

**Evergreen Shrubs****Blue Star Juniper, *Juniperus squamata* ‘Blue Star’**

A brilliant blue-green, this tough little shrub is well-adapted for sunny, well-drained areas. Maturing to a height of 3 feet by about 4 feet in width, ‘Blue Star’ is a compact juniper that is ideal for foundation planting.

**Brouwer’s Beauty Andromeda, *Pieris x* ‘Brouwer’s Beauty’**

An exceptionally hardy cross between the Japanese and mountain pieris, this compact, slow-growing plant is noted for its narrow, dark green foliage. Maturing at a height of 3 to 5 feet with a somewhat greater spread, this versatile pieris is an excellent choice for foundation planting; facing taller, leggier plants; or for naturalizing.

**Wilson Rhododendron, *Rhododendron x laetevirens***

A compact, mounded plant that reaches a height of 3 feet with a 6 foot spread, the Wilson rhododendron is a neat broad-leaved evergreen. Its highly valued, narrow, mountain laurel-like foliage is its chief ornamental asset. The rosy-pink flowers are attractive, but not overwhelming. A rather hardy rhododendron, this plant prefers well drained sites.

**Taunton Yew, *Taxus x media* 'Tauntonii'**

A smaller, more compact *Taxus* that grows to a height of 3 to 4 feet by a width of 6 to 8 feet, the Taunton yew is extremely resistant to winter burning and responds well to regular pruning.

**Vines**

**Climbing Hydrangea, *Hydrangea anomala* subsp. *Petiolaris***

The climbing hydrangea is an excellent landscape vine with showy, flat-topped flower clusters; glossy, dark-green leaves; and distinctive, exfoliating winter bark. Slow to establish, this vine grows rapidly by clinging rootlets once well-rooted. Use a sturdy support; this plant grows 60 to 80 feet. The climbing hydrangea is generally hardy in central and southern New Hampshire.

*Fact sheet developed by UNH Extension Educator Ralph Winslow.  
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