The Burkwood viburnum (Viburnum × burkwoodii), first developed in England, is a dependable shrub that displays great beauty while standing up to tough urban conditions. In many ways it exemplifies the best characteristics of viburnums. Its pink blooms appear for two weeks every April and are very fragrant. It can be used in hedges, borders and entranceways, and as a specimen planting. Some 18 Oregon nurseries grow it (see www.nurseryguide.com).
These easy-care shrubs offer many attractive attributes

By Lisa Albert

It doesn't take more than a quick glance through the V's in a plant encyclopedia to realize that there are riches to be found within the Viburnum genus.

The Oregon Association of Nurseries 2010 Directory & Buyers Guide lists a dizzying 62 different species, hybrids and cultivars of these beautiful, easy-care shrubs.

Whether the home gardener wants flowers, fragrance, great fall color, attractive evergreen foliage, or bird-attracting berries, there is a viburnum to match the need.

Additionally, viburnums offer multiple seasons of interest, so there's no shortage of choices for retail nursery display areas. They can lure customers to the garden center during traditionally slow sales periods, boosting the odds of those important customer impulse buys.

“In February, we'll show Viburnum bodnantense ‘Dawn’ because it's got a fragrant blossom early in the spring before the leaves come on,” said Lee Powell, a landscape architect and co-owner of Garland Nursery in Corvallis, Ore. “There aren't a lot of other exciting plants at that time so we'll bring that up and sell it.

“We'll bring up the snowball tree (Viburnum opulus ‘Sterile’) when it's in bloom … (with) these giant white snowballs in late April or early May. We'll bring up the doublefile viburnums (Viburnum plicatum var. tomentosum) when they're in bloom in May. We also use (viburnums) a lot in fall … and sell them for their fall color.”

Doublefile viburnums make a repeat appearance, showing off reddish purple fall color instead of layered tiers of white spring blooms. American cranberry bush (Viburnum trilobum) is another viburnum with great red fall color that often shows up in the entry display at Garland Nursery.

“(In October) we’ll pull up some of the others for their berries, like (Viburnum) nudum and (Viburnum) dilatatum,” Powell said.

He's particularly excited about two new Viburnum introductions: Viburnum dilatatum ‘Cardinal Candy™', a cultivar with improved cold hardiness, features bright red berries. Viburnum nudum
Brandywine™ has purple and pink berries. "I've only seen a picture (of 'Brandywine'™)," Powell said. "If the berry is like its picture, boy, it will sell like crazy!"

Looking their berry best
Putting viburnums with their best berry forward takes forethought and requires changes in standard nursery pruning practices. But the payoff – presenting plants that appeal to consumers – is worth it.

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**Picks from the Pros**

It isn’t hard to get growers to talk about plants. The tough part is getting them to narrow down their list of favorites to just a handful. Here are some of the varieties our sources recommended:

Lee Powell
Owner / Landscape Architect
Garland Nursery, Corvallis, Ore.

Shasta doublefile viburnum (Viburnum plicatum var. tomentosum ‘Shasta’) – This is an 8-10 foot tall deciduous shrub with beautiful, creamy white flowers in spring, nicely textured leaves, and rusty red fall color. It makes a nice focal point plant. Hardy to zones 4-8.

Viburnum × burkwoodii ‘Mohawk’ – 6-8 feet. A tall deciduous shrub with pink buds opening to a white flower. Nice orange-red fall color. Zones 4-8.

Chinese viburnum (Viburnum propinquum) – Dense shrub with glossy green leaves that can be pruned into a hedge or left alone. It is evergreen, fairly drought-tolerant. About 6 feet tall and wide. Zones 8-9

Mike Anderson
Propagation Manager
Carlton Plants, Dayton, Ore.

Onondaga viburnum (Viburnum sargentii ‘Onondaga’) – Zone 4-7. Height 6-8’, spread 5-7’. This is an introduction from the U.S. National Arboretum, and it is one of the best viburnums for foliage. Its velvety, dark maroon new growth turns green with a purple tinge. In the fall, the color then turns to a brilliant, deep red. It has attractive, creamy-colored ray flowers in the spring. It has red fruit, but not a great display.

Compact European cranberrybush (Viburnum opulus ‘Compactum’) – Zone 3-8. Height 4-6’, spread 4-5’. A selected compact form of Viburnum opulus that forms a dense, rounded globe with deep green foliage. Its showy flowers in April/May will consistently yield a large crop of very showy, scarlet fruit persisting well into the winter. Good red fall color. Best in full sun.

Burkwood viburnum (Viburnum × burkwoodii) – Zone 4-8. Height 8-10’, spread 4-6’. A very reliable fragrant viburnum, it is upright and somewhat open in form. It has lustrous, dark green leaves with good red and orange fall color. Its early-blooming, attractive pink flower buds open to white with an intoxicating fragrance.

Jerry Brown
Marketing and Business Development Director
Fisher Farms, Gaston, Ore.

Brandywine™ Viburnum (Viburnum nudum ‘Bulk’ PPAF) – A Proven Winners Color Choice shrub that is distinguished by its unusual clusters of vivid pink and blue berries in the fall. It grows to about 6 feet tall and is a Zone 5 plant. The foliage is a great maroon-red in the autumn.

Blue Blaze™ viburnum (Viburnum dentatum ‘Blubzam’) – A new selection from the breeding work of Lake County. It has a nice, dense, rounded habit with attractive gunmetal-green foliage with a deep wine frost tone. In the autumn, the foliage turns a lustrous red-purple. It produces prolific clusters of majestic blue berries in the fall. A Zone 3 plant that reaches 5 feet.

Raspberry tart arrowwood viburnum (Viburnum dentatum ‘Rastzam’) – Another wonderful cultivar from Lake County. It has nice, bright shiny foliage with abundant white flowers in the spring. Has a rounded shape reaching to 5 feet and is hardy to Zone 3. The fall color is outstanding with raspberry-red color, simply dazzling. It then produces blue-black fruit.

Autumn Jazz™ viburnum (Viburnum dentatum ‘Ralph Senior’) is a great fall interest shrub. Its leaves turn to shades of yellow, orange and burgundy. In the spring it bears white flowers; in the summer it bears stonefruit that attract birds and wildlife.

‘Brandywine™’ has purple and pink berries.

“I’ve only seen a picture (of ‘Brandywine™’),” Powell said. “If the berry is like its picture, boy, it will sell like crazy!”

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“For Le Tour des Plants (an OAN annual event in September) … we set aside a percentage of the crop of ‘Cardinal Candy™’ and ‘Brandywine™’ (with instructions to) keep the shears off these and let them berry up,” said Jerry Brown, operations manager for Fisher Farms in Gaston, Ore. “We realize that the selling season extends through a long period of time. Certainly, fall (presents) another selling opportunity.”

The rest of the crop is trimmed “to keep body on them” so that
**Pest alert**

In general, viburnums are trouble-free, low-maintenance plants, exhibiting minor problems such as powdery mildew on *Viburnum tinus* and leaf scorch on *Viburnum davidii* (when exposed to afternoon sun in dry situations). However, not all species are as trouble-free as the next. There is varying susceptibility to *Phytophthora ramorum* (SD) and viburnum leaf beetle.

*Viburnum* leaf beetles have plagued viburnums in the Northeast for years, as they chew their way through landscapes and forests where many *Viburnum* species are endemic. In 2001, the beetle reared its ugly head in British Columbia, Canada. It has since been spotted in Whatcom County, Wash. and all reports show it to be on an inevitable march southward to Oregon.

Because both larvae and the adult beetle feed on the leaves, plants do not have time to grow new foliage between attacks. Although initial damage is predominately aesthetic, according to Robin Rosetta, associate professor with Oregon State University, North Willamette Research and Education Center in Aurora, Ore., that damage equals lost sales. Few customers will be eager to purchase a viburnum with skeletonized leaves.

Additionally, repeated attacks deplete a plant’s energy; two to three consecutive years of infestation will eventually kill a plant. At present, there are limited methods to control this pest that has no known natural enemies. One cultural remedy is to monitor branches for scars that indicate over-wintering eggs, and prune and destroy infested branches.

Another is to grow species that have shown resistance to the pest. According to a list compiled by Dr. Paul Weston, Woody Plant Entomologist, Cornell University, resistant choices include the popular *Viburnum bodnantense*, *V. davidii* and *V. plicatum var. tomentosum*.

For further information, contact Rosetta by phone at 503-678-1264, ext. 133 or by email at robin.rosetta@oregonstate.edu, or consult the viburnum leaf beetle page at the Pacific Northwest Nursery IPM Web site (http://oregonstate.edu/dept/nurspest/viburnum_leaf_beetle.htm), which includes the link to Dr. Weston’s susceptibility list (http://www.hort.cornell.edu/vib/suscept.html).

While some viburnums are self-fruitful, other viburnums produce heavier crops of berries when pollinated by another species or another variety within the same species of viburnum.

“*Viburnum nudum* ‘Winterthur’ is said to be a great pollinator for other varieties and species of viburnums, including some of the dentatums,” Anderson said. “They’ll fruit heavier if they’re planted near a (*Viburnum*) nudum.”

European highbrush cranberry (*Viburnum opulus*) is one of the recommended fruiting viburnums, both for looks and for wildlife. Humans are urged to be cautious about eating the berries, however. They can cause mild stomach upset.
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The Blue Blaze™ viburnum (Viburnum dentatum ‘Blubzam’) was so named for its abundance of bright blue berries that attract wildlife. Its foliage also offers fall interest, turning reddish purple. Like other arrowwood viburnums (Viburnum dentatum), it does well in poor conditions.

Viburnum nudum ‘Winterthur’ is a favored pollinator for Viburnum nudum ‘Brandywine’™. Planting the two together will result in heavier fruiting on both shrubs.

Location also plays a role in a plant’s fruiting performance.

“(Viburnums) tend to fruit a lot better on the East Coast,” Anderson said. “They can be spectacular, and rarely do you see the (same ones) fruit as well here for whatever reasons, whether it’s inadequate pollination or if it’s the climate.”

Their cold-hardiness – some are rated to Zone 2 – plays a part in their appeal to gardeners in cold regions, such as Colorado, Idaho and Utah, the three states that represent the bulk of out-of-state sales for Fisher Farm’s 18 cultivars of viburnums.

A garden foundation

Whatever the reason behind demand, viburnums play an important role in home gardens, serving as foundation plants, hedging material and “bones” in mixed borders.

An added bonus is that berry-producing viburnums provide food for wildlife, helping homeowners create gardens that are not only beautiful, but serve an additional purpose.

Their one shortcoming is that the majority of viburnums grow into large shrubs – in the 8 to 15 feet high and wide realm – limiting their use in containers and small gardens. Viburnum opulus ‘Nanum’ is one of the rare choices for the two to three foot category. However, we can expect to see new dwarf cultivars and hybrids hit the market, along with other improved selections of these favorite landscape shrubs.

Breeders and growers look for four key features when choosing viburnums for today’s landscapes: flower appeal, berry set, fall color and, to meet today’s smaller gardens, viburnums that offer all those attributes in a compact size.
In the Biltmore for your Home line, Fisher Farms offers Viburnum dentatum 'Raspberry Tart' and Viburnum plicatum var. tomentosum ‘Fireworks’, two cultivars developed by Jim Zampini at Lake County Nursery in Ohio that are reduced versions of the species form.

“Jim likes to develop plants that are very low maintenance,” Brown said. “He wants plants that are more compact, requiring less trimming by the homeowner. He also considers leaf quality while in season and great fall color … and fruit. He’s trying to get them downsized to fit in today’s backyards, which are smaller.”

When dwarf options are limited, encourage consumers to choose viburnums that adapt to heavy, regular pruning, such as Viburnum tinus and its cultivars. Powell doesn’t recommend heavy pruning with large-leaved viburnums, such as Viburnum davidii, an evergreen he likes to use in his designs for its bold, heavily textured leaves and blue berries. He recommends pruning it back once every few years to keep it under control.

Alternatively, tall-growing viburnums, such as Viburnum opulus ‘Sterile’, adapt well to training as small trees.

“Tree-forms are very popular … people’s yards are smaller (and) a lot of people are doing container gardens on patios. (Patio trees) are selling very well,” Powell said.

And if all the above assets aren’t enough, there are even viburnums that boast drought resistance.

“Viburnum tinus is definitely on the drought-resistant end,” Powell said. “I think, once established, the dilatatum should be fairly drought-resistant. The trilobum are also drought-resistant.”

The final trick to selling these plants is to show the plant in context with other plants in a design. This is especially true for Viburnum davidii, a hard-working shrub that may be over-
Viburnum × ‘Emerald Triumph’ was introduced by the University of Minnesota in 1994. Its deep green, glossy foliage is a major point of interest. It bears white blooms in the spring, followed by red fruits that turn black in the summer.

This richly diverse group of plants has much to offer the home gardener. The key to sales is to show-off viburnums’ wonderful qualities, provide the best choices to meet customers’ needs, and pair those choices with other great plants to create a great-looking garden.

Lisa Albert is a freelance garden writer based in Tualatin, Ore. Her work has been featured in Sunset magazine. Contact her at lja.garden@verizon.net or visit her website at www.lisaalbertwriter.com.