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by Trish Beckjord

Black Haw Viburnum — *Viburnum prunifolium*

It seems like often when we think of native plants, we go first to wildflowers. But we shouldn't forget our native trees and shrubs which are often the important backbone of support for many of our pollinators. Black Haw Viburnum, a great native shrub/small tree, is one such plant. Planting it is a wonderful way to add a native plant to your garden that will require minimal care.

One of the best things about Black Haw is that it provides strong three-season interest in your landscape. We are lucky that this great plant grows naturally in our part of Pennsylvania!

This native woody plant is a slow to medium grower that will typically top out at about 12 to 15 feet high and 8 to 12 feet wide in 15-20 years.

If grown with a single trunk it is a lovely specimen tree. As a tall multi-stem shrub, it is an equally attractive addition. When mixed in a woodland edge or shrub border, it adds a spot of flower and color through the seasons.

Black Haw is a very adaptable species that is not particular about soil type or moisture. It will grow successfully both in drier soils and those with good soil



Black Haw single trunk tree form works well along this parking lot edge.
Photo: [Missouri Botanical Garden](#)



This lovely multi-stem specimen shows the full crown that can develop when Black Haw is grown in full sun. Photo: [Landscape Plants of the Upper Midwest](#)

moisture (mesic). Soil types may be loam with clay or sand and can be rocky. An understory woodland species, it prefers part sun to part shade but can be grown in the full sun where it will develop a fuller crown as seen in the above image.

Clusters (cymes) of small white flowers bloom for approximately 2 weeks between April and June - the first stage of the three-season interest this species brings to your garden.

Flowers produce both nectar and pollen (but not scent) that attract small native mining bees (*Andrena*), small sweat bees (*Lasioglossum*) and small native flies. Butterflies, skippers, and hummingbird moths are also attracted to the flowers as are the caterpillars of the Spring and Summer Azure, and Baltimore Checkerspot butterflies which feed on flowers/buds and leaves respectively.

In addition to these butterflies, Black Haw is also a host plant for the Clearwing Hummingbird Moth. Pair this viburnum with *Monarda fistulosa* which attracts these beautiful fliers in your garden for full life cycle support for these beautiful day-flying moths See [this post](#) from The Natural Web for more images and information.

The fruit, a drupe that matures in the fall from yellow to blue-black, adds the second seasonal interest. It is sweet and edible though there is not much flesh surrounding the inner seed. More than one plant will help improve fruit set. Love birds? A wide variety of species are attracted to the drupes during their fall migration.

Fall leaf color changes from a glossy deep green in summer to a lovely deep reddish/purple that contrasts nicely with the fruit – our third attractive character.



Photo: Zach Hinchberger <https://www.facebook.com/WildflowersOfWesternPennsylvania/posts/4129821397107837>



Edible fruit for people and songbirds. Game birds, squirrels and chipmunks also seek this tasty treat

Photo: [Landscape Plants of the Upper Midwest](#)

Use Black Haw in mass plantings, small groupings, as an accent, or in a hedge as a screen. It can be pruned and is a great substitute for introduced species such as Burning Bush (*Euonymus elata*) which is invasive in our woodlands. Since Black Haw flowers on old wood, it should be pruned right after flowering.

Black Haw is a very attractive plant with high wildlife value that should be planted in gardens more often! Beauty + ecology! What's not to love!

For more reading about this native wildflower, see [Wildflowers of Western Pennsylvania](#) on Facebook. Use the search tool and search for the scientific name.



The glossy, deep purplish-red fall color is an eye-catcher!
Photo: [Landscape Plants of the Upper Midwest](#)

A note about cultivars: Cultivars are selections of a species or hybrids of several species that are propagated vegetatively or by tissue culture in order to maintain the preferred character. There is a cultivar of Black Haw called '[Summer Magic](#)' that is said to be a more compact form. Hence, all Viburnum 'Summer Magic' are genetically identical. The nectar or pollen value can be diminished or lost with these manipulations. Changes in leaf color can also have a negative impact. When possible, it is best to plant the native species. For more information on this question see Annie White's [How Native Plant Cultivars Affect Pollinators](#).