

Native Viburnum is a versatile, hardy plant for gardeners.

Some folks seem to think they can't have a beautiful garden using native plants. One plant that contradicts that theory is viburnum. Though there are over 150 varieties of this plant, Walter's Viburnum is native to Florida and a good all-around choice for most gardeners.

Walter's Viburnum can be grown as a small tree or a shrub. It bursts forth with creamy, white flowers in late winter and early spring when few other flowers are found. These beautiful white flowers form in clusters and are mildly fragrant. In the summer, the plant sports a flattened oval berry that turns from red to black at maturity. Birds and other wildlife feed on the fruit and disperse the seeds. The shrub also provides nest sites and cover from predators.

In the wild the plant can grow from 6 to 25 feet tall and live for about 50 years. It is ideal for bird nesting because of its spreading, cross-branched, twiggy crowns. Generally it is found in coastal and river plains from South Carolina, Alabama and throughout Florida. It likes moist soils and is often found in swamps. It can take the cold fairly well.

Because it is a native plant, it is adapted well to Florida's hot, wet summers and dry winters. It is a hardy plant and can grow in sun or shade. Unlike its exotic family members, Walter's Viburnum doesn't need to be clipped very often. Because it is a fairly slow grower, it will flower and fruit more often than the exotic varieties that must be clipped constantly to be kept in check.

The leaves are about 1-2 inches, opposite and shiny. It can have multiple trunks or send out suckers and form a thicket where it is growing. Young twigs have reddish fuzz that is very attractive. Since it is an evergreen, it adds color to gardens especially in the winter months when other plants may not be in bloom and are losing their leaves and color.

For best blooming results, Walter's Viburnum should be planted in full sun. It will grow quite well in partial shade, but blooms will not be as abundant. It is drought tolerant and, once established, needs very little supplemental watering.

This plant is ideal as a hedge or shrub. It tolerates pruning and often is made into a topiary. If left on its own, the plant will become a dense rounded shrub which will eventually turn into a small tree with a broad spreading crown.

The plant can be propagated by cuttings. New shoots from spring growth or semi hardwood cuttings in the fall will generally root.

Walter's Viburnum is one of those all-around great plants for most gardens. It can serve as a shrub or tree, is easy to propagate, stays green all year and attracts wildlife. Butterflies sip the nectar from the flowers and birds and other creatures eat the autumn fruits. It is a favorite for nesting birds such as cardinals and song birds.

Walter's Viburnum is just one of the many native plants that will be offered at the Air Potato Exchange Day on January 9th. To learn more about how you can get a free native plant, you can attend the second workshop on Florida's invasive exotic plants and animals in October. It will be an opportunity to learn about some of the problem species of plants in our county, learn what you can do about the problem and possibly win a free, native plant. The workshop will be free and refreshments will be served. We haven't set the October date yet, but keep watching your newspaper for updates.

For more information, give us a call at (863) 402-6545 or visit our website at www.highlandsswcd.org.