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Sonoma superstar shrubs aren't all California natives

By SONOMA COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS
FOR THE PRESS DEMOCRAT



Berberis 'Orange rocket' (Barberry) is a beautiful non-native shrub that offers food for birds in the fall and does well in California's North Bay climate. Christa Jeremiason/The Press Democrat

Question: My garden has a number of California natives. I'm thinking of adding some new non-native shrubs that do well in our climate. What do you suggest?

Answer: In making your selection, we suggest that you look for plants to complement what you already have and with similar water requirements to natives. Maybe you have plants of a certain color, or of varied heights. Perhaps you want a garden that

serves a purpose like habitat support, as well as drought tolerance and disease resistance. Visit our Sonoma Superstars list for some non-native recommendations that achieve the look you want (<https://tinyurl.com/tkyh3tt5>). Also consider visiting local nurseries to get a closer look at plants you're thinking of adding. Perhaps your neighbors have plants in their gardens that you admire and will grow well in your yard.

For color, barberry bushes (*Berberis thunbergii* and cultivars) are some of the most beautiful of landscape plants, with striking variations of spring and autumn colors. The yellow-to-orange flowers produce waxy red-purple berries.

There are both evergreen and deciduous varieties, ranging in size from one to six feet tall and wide. You can use them as specimen plants or plant them in a row and prune as a hedge. To maintain a pleasing shape, prune barberry lightly in early summer after they bloom.

Barberries thrive in sun to part shade, have moderate water needs, and are disease and deer resistant. Birds eat the berries in fall and winter as a food source and then disperse seeds in their droppings.

Mexican orange blossom (*Choisya ternata*) is an evergreen bush known for its showy white blooms in summer and intoxicating fragrance. It also attracts both butterflies and bees. Mexican orange blossom grows from four to eight feet tall and wide and prefers afternoon shade, with full shade in the hottest locations. Plant it in soil with good drainage; it is moderately drought tolerant once established. It has no serious disease or insect issues and needs little pruning other than removing dead or damaged branches.

Australian fuchsia (*Correa* spp.) is a lovely shrub with long, narrow pink flowers that attract hummingbirds. Moderate to large plants grow up to eight feet wide; compact varieties grow two to three feet tall and wide. It likes full sun to part shade with moderate watering. It's also deer and disease resistant.

Be careful not to overwater or over fertilize it. Regular light pruning stimulates new growth and flowering while preventing the bush from becoming rangy.

Oakleaf hydrangea bushes (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) are stunning plants with cone-shaped white summer flowers and leaves that turn red, purple and bronze in the fall.

They have a notably different flower and leaf appearance from most hydrangeas people are used to seeing.

The normal bush size is six feet tall, but both taller and dwarf varieties are available. These plants grow in a range of lighting from full sun to full shade but prefer dappled shade. They need less water than standard hydrangeas and do best in well-drained soil that is amended with compost.

To control size and stimulate new growth, prune them after they've bloomed. Next year's flowers will appear on the tips of new growth. As shrubs mature, cut a few stems to the ground and remove any that are damaged or crowded.

Chinese fringe flower (*Loropetalum chinense*) is a large evergreen bush with graceful, arching branches. There are many kinds available, but the purple-leafed pink-flowering varieties are especially beautiful. It typically grows six to eight feet tall but can reach 20 feet or more.

This versatile plant can be pruned as a specimen bush, as a small tree, as an espalier against a fence or wall or in a row to form a border or screen. It prefers full sun with some afternoon shade, with well-draining soil. Once established, it's drought tolerant with no serious insect or disease issues. Prune after flowering to control desired size and shape and remove any dead branches.

Contributors to this week's column were Wendy Stern, Karen Felker and Patricia Decker. The UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County sonomamg.ucanr.edu/ provides environmentally sustainable, science-based horticultural information to Sonoma County home gardeners. Send your gardening questions to scmgpd@gmail.com. You will receive answers to your questions either in this newspaper or from our Information Desk. You can contact the Information Desk directly at 707-565-2608 or mgsonoma@ucanr.edu.