

New and Underused Woody Plants: A Personal Perspective®

John E. Elsley

Director of Horticulture, Klehm's Song Sparrow Farm, 13101 E. Rye Road, Avalon, Wisconsin 53505 U.S.A.

Email: info@songsparrow.com

This is a personal selection of trees and shrubs, consisting of both recent introductions and others that have been around for longer periods of time that, for various reasons have not, I feel, received the recognition they merit. This latter category of plants have "stood the test of time," a claim that many recent introductions cannot assert!

Most of the subjects chosen exhibit one or more outstanding ornamental features, including flowers, fruits, foliage, and overall form or habit. By considering this "Four F Factor" when initially selecting plants, one can greatly enhance the worthy goal of extended seasonal ornamental interest. Selections are broadly listed by their main seasons of ornamental interest with a general hardiness range indicated.

WINTER

***Edgeworthia chrysantha* 'Red Dragon'**. Chinese rice paper plant, a daphne relative, has long lasting (6–8 weeks), fragrant, orange-red flower clusters in January, and yellow fall foliage. Zones 7–9.

***Mahonia* × *media* 'Winter Sun' (*M. japonica* × *M. lomariifolia*)**. One of several outstanding clones. Year-round ornamental interest. Fragrant spires of yellow winter flowers: Blue spring fruits: glossy evergreen foliage: strong architectural form. Excellent hedge plant. Shade and drought tolerant.

***Pinus* 'Forest Sky' (*P. strobus* × *P. ayacahuite*)**. Hardy selection of the Mexican white pine (*P. ayacahuite*). Excellent substitute for white pines (*P. strobus*) especially further south. Stocky, compact, handsome conifer with attractive blue-green foliage. Resinous, long pendulous cones. Very drought tolerant. Zones 4–9.

***Thuja occidentalis* Technito™ mission arborvitae ('Bailjohn')**. Dwarf mission arborvitae. Dense, compact, pyramidal form. Dark green foliage holds color in winter. Requires very little shearing. Zones 3–8.

***Thuja occidentalis* Techny Gold™ Arborvitae ('Walter Brown')**. Golden mission arborvitae. Nonburning, rich golden foliage. Color intensifies in winter. Excellent specimen, evergreen, screen, or hedge plant. Zones 3–8.

***Corylus avellana* Red Majestic® filbert**. Classic winter-interest shrub with contorted stems. Red-purple young foliage turning green especially further south, as the season advances. Aim to produce plants on their own roots—avoids sucker growth. Zones 4–8.

***Betula nigra* Fox Valley™ ('LITTLE KING')**. Dwarf Illinois selection of native river birch. Compact, rounded habit, 8 ft tall × 12 ft wide in 25 years at Morton Arboretum. Attractive exfoliating bark year-round interest. Prune to expose bark. Superb specimen or low hedge. Zones 4–8.

SPRING

***Forsythia* 'Happy Centennial'**. Canadian introduction. Very reliable bloomer in North, cold-hardy flower buds. Attractive narrow serrated leaves turn purple-red in fall. Graceful, low habit, 2–3 ft tall. Zones 4–8.

***Forsythia viridissima* 'Kumson'**. Korean forsythia white-veined “reticulated” leaves. Effect intensifies during summer. Attractive contrast with heavy spring bloom. Upright arching form. Zones 5–8.

***Cercis chinensis* 'Don Egolf'**. First named U.S. National Arboretum red bud introduction. Ideal for small gardens. Thick leathery, healthy foliage. Excellent in South and best species for West Coast. Zones 7–9.

***Cercis canadensis* 'Little Woody'**. North Carolina selection. Dwarf, upright grower with very short internodes. Attractive leathery bluish green “corrugated” leaves. Excellent for small gardens. Zones 6–9.

***Corylopsis spicata* 'Aurea'**. Some what neglected Japanese-genus winter hazels. Striking yellow-chartreuse foliage. Holds color. Pendulous clusters of 6–12 pale yellow flowers during spring. Graceful mounded to spreading habit. Light shade. Zones 5–8.

***Fothergilla gardenii* Beaver Creek® fothergilla ('KLMtwo')**. Roy Klehm selection. Excellent performer in Midwest. Dense compact grower whose bluish-green leaves turn orange-yellow in fall. Heavy blooming, clustered creamy-white honey-scented flowers. Good pest and disease resistance. Light shade. Ideal for small landscapes. Zones 4–8.

***Fothergilla* × *intermedia* 'Blue Shadow'**. Outstanding sport of *F.* 'Mt. Airy' from Gary Handy. Pale powder-blue foliage. Color retained through summer even in South. More vigorous and easier to grow than *F.* 'Blue Mist' Zones 4–8.

***Rhododendron* 'Mikkeli'**. Marjetta hybrid from Dr. Peter Tigerstedt, University of Helsinki, Finland. Cold hardy (-35 to -40°F). Elepidote. Compact 4–6 ft tall. Truss of white, green flowers. Several of these hybrids have thrived for 15 years at the Longenecker Arboretum, Madison, Wisconsin. Zones 4–7.

***Rhododendron* 'Haaga'**. Upright grower. 5–7 ft tall. Coarse, dark green foliage. Early trusses of deep pink flowers. (Note: Select a sheltered location from sun and wind in winter-especially further North.).

***Rhododendron* 'Lemon Lights'**. Lights Series, Dr. Harold Pellett, University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. Extremely hardy. (35–45 °F.) with no winter damage. Excellent disease resistance-powdery mildew. Beautiful yellow selection. Color carries in landscape, some fall rebloom. Excellent fragrance. Maroon fall foliage. Zones 4–8.

***Rhododendron* 'Fragrant Star'**. Polyploid form of *R.* 'Snowbird' (*R. atlanticum* × *R. canescens*). One of the most fragrant deciduous azaleas, very heat tolerant. Large white flowers and handsome blue-green foliage than *R.* 'Snowbird' Zones 6–9.

***Magnolia* 'Daybreak'**. Dr. August Kehr, possibly his finest hybrid. Large (10–12 inches) strongly fragrant pink flowers. Late blooming (April, May) avoids late frosts. Has flowered after -28 °F. Good flower bud hardiness. Golden yellow fall color. Zones 5–8.

***Magnolia* 'Coral Lake'**. Dr. David Leach hybrid between two yellow cultivars—*M.* 'Legend' × *M.* 'Butterflies'. Stunning new color-complex blend of coral/yellow and pink. Very fragrant. Prolific bloomer. Late, avoids late frosts. Vigorous, small, semi-fastigate tree. Zones 5–8.

***Magnolia virginiana* 'Green Shadow'**. Don Shadow selection of our native evergreen sweet bay. Narrow, upright form—striking landscape impact. Larger than normal lemon-scented cream flowers. Very long blooming season. Flowers and fruits together in late summer. No damage at -15 °F. Zones 5–9.

***Malus* 'Satin Cloud'**. Father John Fiala introduction. Octoploid. One of the finest small crabapples. Dense, dwarf, spreading, 15 ft tall × 20 ft spread. Prolific pink buds. Cinnamon-scented satin-white flowers. Small yellow fruits. Thick dark green, scab-resistant leaves turn a stunning fiery red in fall. Zones 4–8.

***Malus* 'Louisa'**. Selected and named for her granddaughter by Polly Hill. Neat weeping habit, 15 ft × 15 ft. Ideal for small gardens. Numerous yellow fruits. Healthy dark, glossy green foliage. Zones 4–8.

***Syringa vulgaris* 'Little Boy Blue' (syn. 'Wonder Blue')**. One of numerous outstanding Father John Fiala hybrids. Dwarf compact habit 5–6 ft tall. Very fragrant sky-blue flowers from red-purple buds. Flowers displayed at eye and nose level! Excellent disease resistance. Zones 3–7.

***Syringa Tinkerbelle*TM lilac ('Bailbelle')**. Neil Holland, North Dakota first of the Fairytale Lilacs (*S. meyeri* × *S. macrophylla* 'Superba'). Growth/bloom time of the dwarf Korean lilac and foliage of the little-leaf lilac. Very hardy, upright compact form. 5–6 ft. Wine red buds form spicy fragrant pink flowers. A new color for dwarf lilacs. Neat mildew resistant foliage. Zones 3–7.

***Chionanthus virginicus* 'Emerald Knight'**. One of the few selections of our native fringe tree. Seedling selection by Brian Upchurch, North Carolina. Large thick leathery leaves held late in season. Golden-yellow fall color. Lacy white flowers prior to emerging spring foliage. Zones 5–9.

SUMMER

***Rosa* 'Hawkeye Belle'**. One of Griffith Buck's (Iowa State University) finest creations—an overlooked group of hardy roses. Best on own roots. Grandiflora, extremely fragrant, fully double, bluish pink flowers all summer. Healthy dark green foliage. Vigorous, compact (3½ ft) Roses should be thought of as flowering shrubs. Zones 4–8.

***Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Big Daddy'**. Japan selection by Itsaul Plants, Atlanta, GA. Huge flower heads (mophead). Very attractive large glossy dark green foliage. Strong grower. Zones 6–8.

Hydrangea macrophylla 'Nachtigall' (syn. 'Nightingale'). Teller Series selection from Germany. Strikingly beautiful lacecap, large flower heads. Strong upright grower, very strong stems. Thick glossy, dark green leaves. Pleasing yellow fall color. "One of the finest selections!" Zones 6–8.

Hydrangea quercifolia 'Little Honey'. Unique dwarf, yellow foliage form of our native oak leaf hydrangea. Sport of *H.* 'Pee Wee' from Briggs Nursery, Washington. Foliage color breakthrough. Zones 5–8.

Hydrangea quercifolia 'Vaughn's Lillie'. Georgia selection. Huge pendulous, pyramidal, densely packed inflorescences of creamy-white flowers. Striking red-purple fall color. Zones 5–8.

Hydrangea paniculata 'Dharuma'. Low, mounded Japanese selection. Superb for container production. Very early flowering 5–6 weeks ahead of other clones. White inflorescence turns rose in fall. Flower heads in scale with plant size, 3 ft tall ideal for small landscapes. Zones 4–8.

Xanthoceras sorbifolium. Pink-flowered form of the Chinese yellowhorn. Roy Klehm selection. Greatly underused/overlooked species. Early summer flowering. Airy divided foliage. Picturesque winter branching. Small shrub to tree of year round ornamental interest. Zones 4–8.

Styrax japonicus 'Variegatus'. Neat, crisp, clean variegated foliage, which retains its charm throughout summer. Pendulous early summer flowers. Handsome small tree. Zones 5–8.

Halesia carolina 'Hawksridge Pink'. Hawksridge Nursery, North Carolina introduction. Large clear mid-pink flowers in early summer. Zones 4–8.

Viburnum dentatum Cardinal™ arrowwood viburnum ('KLMthree'). Roy Klehm selection of the native arrowwood viburnum, outstanding performer in the Midwest. Healthy, vigorous summer foliage turns a spectacular red in fall. White inflorescences followed by clusters of vibrant blue fruits in late summer. Superb landscape subject.

Physocarpus opulifolius 'Center Glow'. Harold Pellett introduction. Landscaped Plant Development Center, Minnesota (*P.* 'Diabalo' × *P.* 'Dart's Gold'). Compact ninebark with reddish-pink and yellow emerging foliage turning red and finally dark maroon as the leaves mature. Zones 3–7.

Cornus angustata Empress of China™ dogwood ('Elsbry'). John Elsley seedling selection. Vigorous dark green evergreen foliage holds color in winter. Extremely free flowering even at a young age. Greenish-white flowers in late June–July. Becomes whiter with age and lasts from 6–8 weeks. Blooms 2–3 weeks after *C. kousa*. Red strawberry-like fruits during late summer. Hardy at 0 °F in Winchester, Tennessee. Zones 6b–9.

Cornus kousa 'Summer Fun'. Talon Buchholz selection, Oregon. Broader, bolder creamy leaf margin and no crinkled edge as with *C.* 'Wolf Eyes'. Pleasing pinkish fall color often observed. Very eye catching in landscape. Zones 5–8.

***Corus alternifolia* Golden Shadows® pagoda dogwool (W. Stackman)**. Illinois selection of the native pagoda dogwood. Elegant tiered habit with leaves displaying a bold golden-yellow margin. Excellent substitute for closely related oriental counterparts. Zones 3–7.

***Illicium floridanum* 'Shady Lady'**. Tom Dodd selection of the native Florida anise. A variegated sport of the white-flowered *I. floridanum* 'Semmes'. Pleasing gray-green leaves with yellow margins. Fragrant pale pink late spring flowers. Zones 6–9.

***Davidia involucrata* 'Sonoma'**. Californian form of the paper handkerchief tree, which blooms at a very young age, often 2–3 years old. Flowers in summer with very large (10–12 inch long) bracts — twice the size of normal form. Zones 6–8.

***Caryopteris* × *clandonensis* 'Dyraisey', Summer Sorbet® bluebeard**. Blue mist shrub. Neat yellow-margined foliage holds color throughout growing season and creates a spectacular color combination with the dark blue flowers in late summer. Zones 6–9.

Buddleia alternifolia. A much overlooked Chinese native. The hardiest buddleia. The first buddleia to bloom. Long arching pendulous shoots are clothed with clusters of lilac-purple flowers in mid-summer. Attractive silvery-gray foliage, especially the cultivar 'Argentea'. Hardy in Minneapolis. Zones 4–7.

***Hibiscus syriacus* 'Helene'**. One of several superb sterile forms from Dr. Don Egolf, U.S. National Arboretum. White flowers with a prominent red-purple eye in late summer. Fresh healthy foliage. Tough, underused group of late-flowering, easily grown shrubs. Zones 5–8.

***Clematis* 'Matka Urzula Ledóchowska'**. Outstanding Polish hybrid from Brother Stephan Franchek. Vigorous, healthy, very free flowering. Large white flowers with contrasting red stamens. Silky golden seed heads. Zones 4–9.

***Clematis* 'Dawn'**. Compact Swedish cultivar. Ideal for container growing. Flowers exhibit spectacular combination of colors—white, suffused pink, blue, and green. Bronze young foliage. Excellent winter hardiness. Zones 4–9.

***Clematis* 'Rooguchi'**. Spectacular Japanese *C. integrifolia* hybrid. Prolific repeat bloomer throughout summer. Large, pendulous deep violet-purple bell-shaped flowers. Silky seed heads form together with flowers. Tolerant of light shade. Zones 4–9.

***Fallopia baldschuanica* (syn. *aubertii*) 'Lemon Lace'**. Bluebird Nursery, Nebraska introduction. Golden-yellow foliage with reddish young stems. Holds color all summer, full sun. Foamy white flowers in late summer. Not quite as vigorous as the species and not so invasive. Superb combined with clematis. Zones 4–8

***Acer palmatum* 'Hefner's Red Select'**. Hefner's Nursery, Conover, North Carolina introduction. Outstanding nonburning deep purple, almost black foliage. Young leaves red. Sun or light shade. Zones 5–8.

***Acer shirasawanum* 'Autumn Moon'**. J. D. Vertrees introduction. Excellent heat/humidity tolerance — much better in south than *A. shirasawanum* 'Aureum'. Outstanding orange-copper young foliage produced throughout the summer. Zones 4–7.

***Sambucus nigra* Black Lace™ elderberry ('Eva')**. One of several recent introductions from East Malling Experimental Station, England. Finely divided almost black foliage color. Pinkish flower heads create a beautiful contrast to the foliage. Vigorous, prune formatively. Zones 4–7.

***Sambucus nigra* f. *porphyrophylla* 'Guincho Purple'**. Forms beautiful small multistemmed or single-stem tree with formative pruning. Handsome strongly furrowed bark of year-round ornamental interest. This older cultivar holds its dark foliage color well in cooler climates. Zones 4–7.

***Disanthus cercidifolius* 'Ena-nishiki'**. Japanese witch hazel relative — deserves greater recognition. Gray-green redbud-shaped leaves with an irregular creamy-white margin. Holds color during summer — turns orange-red, purple in fall. Small maroon fall flowers. Beautiful addition to any woodland garden. Zones 5–7.

***Callicarpa dichotoma* 'Duet'**. Recent release from U.S. National Arboretum Research Station, McMinnville, Tennessee. Strong-growing arching shrub with distinctly variegated creamy-white foliage-color retained all season. Purple fall berries. Striking in lightly shaded location.

***Rhus typhina* Tiger Eyes™ staghorn sumac ('Bailtiger')**. Bailey Nursery introduction. Golden-yellow foliage turns typical orange-red in fall. Holds color through summer. Full sun. Zones 4–8.

***Rhus copallina* 'Lanham's Purple'**. Selection of the native flame-leaf sumac from Gary Lanham, Lebanon, Kentucky. Female selection with shiny, deep purple compound leaves, which turn scarlet-red in fall. Spectacular foliage effect. Zones 4–9.

***Corylus* 'Rosita'**. First ornamental release from the Oregon state Hazelnut Breeding Programme led by Shawn Mehlenbacher. A *C. avellana* 'Rotezeller' × *C. colurna* selection. Small upright compact tree. Ruffled edged leaves emerge a dark purple hold this color well into summer. Excellent pest and disease resistance, Eastern filbert blight and big bud mite. Zones 4–8.

***Ginkgo biloba* 'Majestic Butterfly'**. Variegated foliage "sport" of *G.* 'Jade Butterflies'. Dense slow-growing dwarf. Ideal for small gardens. Leaves boldly irregularly marked yellow. Zones 4–8.

***Fagus sylvatica* 'Klein's Copper'**. Seedling selection of the European beech by Theodore Klein, Yew Dell Gardens, Kentucky. Majestic copper beech with burgundy-red young foliage that soon turns copper-purple. Holds color throughout summer. A rare American selection of this classic tree. Zones 4–7.

***Betula nigra* 'Summer Cascade'**. Graceful pendulous river birch from Shiloh Nursery, North Carolina. Very strong grower, 5–6 ft a year. Stake leader to achieve best height and shape. Good foliage and attractive bark of year-round appeal. Zones 4–8.

***Carpinus betulus* 'Vienna Weeping'**. Beautiful European hornbeam from the grounds of the Harsburg Palace in Vienna. Dense elegant pendulous habit. Dark green leaves turn golden yellow in fall. Bark becomes mottled and exfoliating with age. Zones 5b–8.

Parrotia persica 'Vanessa'. Handsome narrow, strongly vertical selection of an under-appreciated small tree. Foliage turns a splendid red/orange in fall. Bark becomes mottled and exfoliating with age. Zones 4–8.

Alnus glutinosa 'Pyramidalis'. Beautiful columnar form of the European black alder. A striking affect that lasts year round. Its unique form is retained into old age. Appreciates constant moisture. Zones 4–7.

Alnus glutinosa 'Razzamataz'. New Zealand selection of the European black alder. Dark green leaves have an irregular light green/yellow margin, color retained during summer. Fall color a golden yellow. Cherry-like bark extends ornamental interest. Thrives in moist locations. Zones 4–7.

Taxodium distichum 'Cascade Falls'. New Zealand selection of our native swamp cypress. Graceful weeping pendulous form. Need to stake leading shoot to achieve height. Zones 4–11.

Taxodium distichum 'Peve Minaret'. Dwarf, narrow Dutch selection reaching 6 ft tall × 2–3 ft wide in 10 years. Superb in small landscapes. Soft lush spring foliage turns orange in fall. Zones 4–11.

Gymnocladus dioica 'Stately Manor'. Handsome male form of the Kentucky coffee tree at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. Stately narrow, upright form. Potentially a magnificent urban tree. Late to leaf out in spring. Zones 4–8.

Robinia pseudoacacia Chicago Blues™ black locust ('Benjamin'). selected by Chicago City Forester Bob Benjamin from a seedling block near O'Hare Airport. Extremely adaptable tree for harsh urban conditions. Minimal thorns and beautiful blue-green foliage. Excellent borer resistance, fragrant white summer flowers. Upright with oblong crown. Zones 4–8.

Nyssa sylvatica 'Carolyn'. Superbly shaped black gum. Raised from seed collected in New Hampshire, extreme northern location. Selected and named for his granddaughter by Dr. Ed Hasselkaus, parent tree at Longenecker Arboretum, Madison, Wisconsin. Develops a strong leader. Attractive fruits and outstanding fall color. Zones 4–9.

Nyssa sylvatica 'Wild Fire'. Selected by Steve Hootovy Beyond Green Nursery, Oregon, from seed collected in central Indiana. New growth always red and present all summer. Forms an attractive regular-shaped specimen tree, with a strong leader and excellent branching. Excellent fall color. A production dream — no staking needed. Zones 4–9.

Nyssa sylvatica 'Autumn Cascades'. Australian black gum selection with a strongly weeping habit. Leader needs staking to attain height. Large dark green glossy foliage producing superb fall color. Zones 5–9.

Nyssa sylvatica 'Zydeco Twist'. A Louisiana black gum selection with twisted, contorted stems. Zones 5–9.

FALL

Hamamelis virginiana 'Green Thumb'. Alex Neubauer selection whose leaves display a dark green center with a lighter green outer margin. A unique color effect especially early in the year. Yellow fall color. Delicate strongly fragrant yellow flowers during late fall and early winter. Zones 4–8.

Hamamelis vernalis 'Autumn Embers'. Roy Klehm introduction with outstanding burgundy-red fall color. Upright growing, very early blooming. This species replaces the *M. ×intermedia* selections further north. Zones 4–8.

Symphoricarpos ×doorenbosii 'Mother of Pearl'. A snowberry with large, persistent white berries with a pinkish sheen. Low, spreading shrub ideal for naturalizing. Zones 4–7.

Callicarpa americana 'Welch's Pink'. Recent heavy fruiting selection from Texas with striking soft pink clustered berries. Very attractive to birds. Zones 7–9.

Aronia melanocarpa Iroquois Beauty™ black chokeberry ('Morton'). Chicagoland Grows introduction of the native black chokeberry with wine-red fall foliage. Low, compact, mounding shrub. Zones 3–8.

Spiraea betulifolia 'Tor'. One of the most outstanding fall foliage shrubs. Extremely long lasting color display of changing orange hues. Dense, low 2–3 ft grower, which creates a beautiful low hedge.