

Fragrant Flowering Spring Shrubs (published 2025-04-26)

By Susanna Barry, Master Gardener

Flowering shrubs are a welcoming sight in spring. The bright yellow forsythia is well known for its grand entrance announcing a seasonal change. While the forsythia is colorful and its arching stems can be useful in accenting a floral arrangement, its scent is basically undetectable. Think about giving your landscape another purpose by adding fragrant flowering shrubs.

Deutzia

A friend of mine recently introduced me to Deutzia. Deutzia is a dazzling, darling deciduous shrub belonging to the Hydrangea family. The more common Hydrangea flower cluster shape is round whereas the Deutzia flowers along its cascading branches. There are 60 varieties of this shrub including dwarf varieties with a height of 3 feet and larger varieties 6 to 10 feet tall and wide. The star shaped flower comes in shades of white or pink. The scent is unique, sweet, fruity and light. It is said to be a magical flower.

Deutzia is native to Japan and parts of Asia. Another name for Deutzia is Japanese Snow Flower. Deutzia, like most plants, thrives in fertile well-drained soil, but it can tolerate clay as well as sand. Deutzia likes full sun but will do well in partial shade. It is deer and drought tolerant. It can be cultivated as a border, maintained as a hedge, or allowed to flourish in a wilderness landscape. It would be a lovely addition to an English cottage garden.

Deutzia flowers bloom on new wood. Like most shrubs, once the shrub has mature growth, it is good to cut back the old wood. Though the blooming cycle for Deutzia is short, the fresh clean green leaves in summer and fall foliage of red, burgundy, and gold can still be attractive. Deutzia is a superb plant.

Sweetshrub (*Calycanthus floridus*)



My grandmother was the first to tell me about the “bubby” bush. She said the ladies used the flowers to freshen up after working in the spring gardens. It is interesting to speak with someone and find out how they refer to this shrub. The North Carolina extension lists eight “Common Names: Bubby Bush, Carolina Allspice, Sweetshrub, Spicebush, Sweet Betsy, Sweet Bubby Bush, and Sweet Shrub.” I suppose it depends on which neck of the woods you come from.

The sweetshrub is a native deciduous shrub and is often found along paths and streams throughout the Appalachians. This unique fragrant flowering shrub has spiral shaped reddish-brown flowers with a delightful apple scent. In the summer after the blooms are gone, the warm green foliage and the woody bark are still fragrant.

Sweetshrub is a woodland plant that prefers loam soil. Loam is a mixture of clay, sand and silt which consists of humus, organic matter from the decaying leaves, such as found in the forest. It withstands cold and heat, insect and disease pests, fire and deer browsing. Plant in full sun to partial shade. It can be planted as a border, foundation planting, backdrop along porch or

pathways, or as privacy screen. A mature shrub can have a height of 6 to 12 feet with matching width. Place the bubbly bush where you can enjoy its delicate fresh fragrance.

Mock Orange (*Philadelphus inodorus*)

Mock orange is another delightfully fragrant shrub in the Hydrangea family to include in your landscape. It is also native to the Appalachians. It has arching branches with flower formations separated on the stem. The lovely four petaled white flower center is made up of numerous yellow stamens. The blossom is like the orange blossom and has a fresh delicate orange scent. There is a dwarf (2-3 feet tall) variety, a double flower, and even a variegated leaf type. The mock orange can grow up to two feet per year, with varieties ranging from 2 to 10 feet tall and wide.

Mock orange likes full sun to partial shade, fertile, loamy, well-drained soil, and is deer tolerant. It can also be cultivated as a border, screen, or left to grow naturally. Plant along walkways, porches and near patios to enjoy the fresh scent in spring/summer. Summer foliage is a vibrant green turning to soft yellow in fall.

Research on plants is always interesting and often surprising. A fact I learned when researching these shrubs is that there is a genus of the mock orange that is a native to western North America in the Sierra Nevada mountains named for Captain Meriwether Lewis (*Philadelphus lewisii*), who collected the plant in 1806.

Plant these shrubs in the right place for them to thrive. Best of all, enjoy the beauty of these fragrant flowering deciduous shrubs.

Resources

“*Deutzia*,” <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/deutzia/>

“*Calycanthus floridus*,” <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/calycanthus-floridus/>

“*Philadelphus inodorus*,” <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/philadelphus-inodorus/>

For more information about gardening, visit UTHORT’s YouTube site for helpful videos: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjS3d1IklH1OZ1Z2qPvhgfQ>

Or Washington County’s YouTube site: <https://www.youtube.com/@utextensionwashingtoncounty>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.