

Ask A Specialist: Some Plants Need Extra Care

04/10/2015



Most retailers do their best to stock nurseries with locally adapted plants. However, it seems most carry a few plants that struggle in our climate. There are a few reasons for this. Sometimes, especially when part of a national chain store, the local outlets may not have much choice as to what is shipped to them. Additionally, some gardeners enjoy the challenge of growing something unique to their area or they have unique situations in the landscape where one of these less-adapted plants may have a better chance of surviving. Consider this information as you are planning your landscape this spring.

- Rhododendrons and Azaleas: These beautiful spring flowering shrubs are among the most popular shrubs outside of the Intermountain West. There are dozens of varieties available. Due to our alkaline soil, they lack the ability to uptake enough iron through their roots. This requires the soil to be amended regularly with chelated iron supplements, compost and possibly a soil acidifying fertilizer. A few better-adapted substitutes for these include shrub roses, dwarf lilacs and some cultivars of ninebark.
- Dogwood Trees: These trees are also very popular outside the Intermountain West. Depending on the species or variety, spring flower color ranges from white to red. Their struggles are similar to the azalea. Alternative trees to consider include various newer varieties of crabapple. These newer crabapples are often bred to have smaller fruit that may not even drop from the tree. Sargent cherry or many species of hawthorn are also great alternatives.
- Japanese Euonymus: This is a broadleaf, evergreen shrub common in warmer areas of the United States. Cultivars often have variegated leaves. In Utah, it is common in St. George and Moab but survives in protected areas along the Wasatch Front. In addition

to lacking cold-hardiness, the species is a favorite of deer. Alternatives with variegated foliage include various cultivars of weigela and variegated shrub dogwood.

- Blueberry: One of the most desired fruits that do not grow well locally is the blueberry. Being related to rhododendrons, they have the same struggles in our soils. Other fruiting shrubs that are much more adapted include serviceberry and currants. Currants perform well in part shade.
- Red Maple and Sugar Maple: These trees are common on the East Coast and are famous for their autumn color. Unfortunately, they often cannot absorb enough iron from our alkaline soils. They are regularly sold under cultivar names such as October Glory, Red Sunset and Armstrong maples. To be sure you are purchasing the right cultivar, check for the Latin names. They are absolute, offer a great way to identify trees and are usually listed on the tag. The Latin names of these are *Acer rubrum* and *Acer sacharum*, respectively. Excellent substitutes include Tatarian maple, Japanese zelkova or seed grown big-tooth maple.

Direct column topics to: Julene Reese, Utah State University Extension writer, Logan, Utah 84322-4900; 435-797-0810; julene.reese@usu.edu