



Ahh – To Grow A Garden – So Get Up and Get Growing –Taylorsville City - Tree Of The Month Article –March 2011 - Growing Rose of Sharon In Your Garden - For reference Taylorsville City is USDA Hardiness zone 7A.

Rose of Sharon is botanically known as *Hibiscus Syriacus*. It also known as the Athena shrub, or the Chinese Hibiscus and is native to Asia. It is the national flower of South Korea where they celebrate a Rose of Sharon festival. No known Rose of Sharon festivals are celebrated in the United States. However, there is a Rose of Sharon Sanctuary in Horton, Kansas reported to stand as a source of inspiration and meditation on the crest of a hill. They are a deciduous, upright growing, and columnar shaped bush, growing 6 to 15 feet tall, 4 to 8 feet wide. It is hardy in United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) hardiness zones 4 to 9. This shrub can be trained to grow as a tree with a central trunk, rather than as a bush with several stems. However, central leader training must begin the first year or two, and usually takes place in the nursery. Rose of Sharon is a relative to the Tropical Hibiscus, and the Hardy Hibiscus, or Rose Mallow as it is more commonly known. Rose of Sharon flowers resemble the Tropical Hibiscus flowers in shape and form being cup-shaped flowers. But, they are considerably smaller than its tropical cousin and are much less showy. However, the flowers are produced rather abundantly which makes up for their smaller size.

Rose of Sharon Flowers and Leaves

Rose of Sharon shrubs come in single, semi-double, or double flower forms. The single flowers are 3 to 4 inches wide, semi-double are 2 to 3 inches, and double flowers are 2 inches across. The single flower varieties are considered by many gardeners as the prettiest and most desirable, because, the flowers open wider, larger, and have contrasting colors either in the eyes or the throats. Both the single and the double flowers have long protruding stamens, but little if any scent. The flowers of this shrub range from pure white, to cream, pink, rose, bright red, mauve, lavender, purple, soft violet, and true blue. The shrubs burst into bloom in mid to late July and continue until frost. If the long blooming cycle is not of interest to you, consider that hummingbirds love them, as do many varieties of bees, and other small insects.

However, they are one of the last trees or shrubs to break dormancy in the spring, so you'll be waiting almost into the summer for the leaves to unfurl. The leaves are either bright green or variegated green and rather small only one inch long and have rough or toothed edges. In autumn they give nothing in the way of a fall foliage show. The leaves don't even change color much at all before they drop to reveal the grayish, bare stems.

Growing Them

The Rose of Sharon is easy to grow, requiring little maintenance, to keep them looking great. They like heat, tolerant drought, and can grow in many different soil types but prefer sandy, or well drained rich loam. These shrubs don't take well to clay but are tolerant if enough organic mulch is used around their roots to improve the soil. They do require regular watering. In the most northern regions of the country, USDA hardiness zones 4 and 5, a thick layer of mulch is beneficial to protect the roots from ground thawing and heaving and may need to be placed away from prevailing winds requiring a bit of winter protection when the plants are young.

When they are young they have a compact and upright form. As they age, however, the branches tend to relax giving the shrub a wider more open airy look. If a more columnar shape is desired, pruning away the heaviest branches will keep it more compact and growing more upright. Rose of Sharon's can be used as a back drop to a perennial planting bed, to form garden rooms, as single specimens in the landscape, or as a great addition to a mixed shrub border. They are often used, as a tall, thick virtually impenetrable hedge, if planted 4 or 5 feet apart, and as a hedge they can't be beat.

But, they do unfortunately have one drawback. Some of the older cultivars have seed capsules that can self-sow making it a bit of a nuisance. But, the little trees are easy to pull out. Some of the newer cultivars that have fewer seed capsules are: Aphrodite (Rose-pink color with red eyes), Diana (pure white), Helene (white with deep red eyes), and Minerva (lavender with mauve-red eyes). Aside from this one draw back, the Rose of Sharon is indeed a wonderful shrub when in flower with hundreds of lasting blossoms and bright green leaves. This plant shows good pollution tolerance, making it a great selection for our urban gardens.





Planting Instructions

This shrub can be planted in either the spring or fall. Some gardeners consider it best to plant this bush in the spring, after the danger of frost is over. Space plants 6 to 10 feet apart, depending on the expected mature size of the plant. Select a sunny location with full sun to light shade with at least six hours of sun a day. Dig a hole only as deep as the root ball and 2 to 3 times as wide. If you have poor soil condition, amend the soil you've removed from the hole with a small amount of compost. Otherwise you will not need to amend the soil at all. Be careful when removing the plant from the container. Loosen the root ball by working the dirt loose to free the roots. Set the root ball in the hole. Fill the hole, half full with soil, then water it well to settle the soil and eliminate air pockets. Let the water drain, then fill the remainder of hole with soil and water thoroughly. Pack the dirt around the root ball of the bush. Add compost or wood chips around the plant and water well.

Care

It is a good idea to apply a layer of compost around the shrub/tree each spring. The 2-inch layer of mulch will help the soil to retain moisture and control weeds. Water plants during the summer to provide 1-inch of water per week. Flowers are produced on new wood, so prune in early spring to shape and reduce size. The Rose of Sharon is not fussy and not generally prone to bugs. But, an occasional insecticide or liquid dish soap wash may help keep the aphids away. They can get aphids like roses and plums do. I had one Rose of Sharon in my yard last year that got aphids really bad, the first time since I planted it in my yard 16 years ago.

Pruning

Unless you have ample space to accommodate this flowering shrub, pruning is helpful to keep it well-maintained. Because Rose of Sharon flower in late summer and early fall, pruning should be done in late winter or very early spring before new buds begin to break through. Remember, you can prune one third of the branches or one third of the height every year in the late winter or early spring. To encourage bigger blooms late winter pruning is recommended. You can remove dead, diseased, and injured branches any time. Pinching the dead blooms off your Rose of Sharon will stimulate it to produce more flowers. Limited pruning can be done in the late spring or summer. Use pruning shears to cut back any stems where you want more growth.

I have nine Rose of Sharon Trees growing here in my yard here in Taylorsville, they are beautiful. The true red ones do not seem to do well here in Taylorsville. The two red ones that I planted have died. My biggest one is a blue Rose of Sharon that did have true blue flowers the first four years it was planted in my yard. Now it blooms a beautiful cream color with one lone branch at the bottom of the shrub with blue flowers. Most of my Rose of Sharons are the double flowering tree variety. I do have some single flowering Rose of Sharon Trees, too and one shrub form in my yard. They do attract a variety of bees and humming birds. No garden is quite complete without one, so do give one a try.



Tree Rose of Sharon Forms

