

The compact, low-spreading form of *Loropetalum* 'Crimson Fire' makes it a great foundation plant, growing just 2–3 feet in height and width.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PLANT INTRODUCTIONS INC.



Neon-pink flowers cover 'Crimson Fire' in spring, while the deep ruby foliage adds interest all season long.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PLANT INTRODUCTIONS INC.

# Small shrubs, big impact

**These diminutive options offer many significant benefits, from berries and color, to beauty and easy care**

**By Elizabeth Petersen**

Like many designers, Lisa Annand of Verdant Garden Northwest often includes compact shrubs in her designs. "With home footprints getting bigger and lot sizes getting smaller, I am always on the lookout for compact shrubs with big impact," she said.

She and other designers are in luck.

Growers continue to discover and introduce shrubs that won't outgrow their limited quarters. Compact shrubs — smaller versions of reliable garden plants — make it easy to decorate outdoor living spaces with foliage, flowers, and even food.

Blueberries are one example. They can be grown into a tidy little hedge that offers something boxwoods can't — a delicious harvest.

High-interest shrubs in compact sizes can produce a myriad of looks with distinctive foliage. For example, new hydrangea varieties have taken on a smaller stature, yet still produce loads of dramatic flowers.

## For food

Edible landscaping has taken the country by storm. The National Gardening Association reports a significant jump in the popularity of food gardening.

In 2013, 42 million households were involved in food gardening. That's 35 percent of all households. Younger consumers were particularly bewitched. Between 2008 and 2013, members of the much-coveted millennial demographic nearly doubled their spending on food gardening from \$632 million to \$1.2 billion. ►

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The main reasons people gave for growing food included quality, taste and nutrition, but their spaces are small and they want beauty, too.

“Who doesn’t want to add delicious beauty to their garden?” Annand asked. She uses the new varieties of dwarf blueberries in almost all her designs. “So many edibles come in compact sizes now that any gardener can find space for some.”

From Fall Creek Farm and Nursery in Lowell, Oregon, the emerging BrazelBerries® Collection of compact shrubs includes three dwarf blueberry varieties and a dwarf, thornless raspberry shrub.

Raspberry Shortcake™, the inaugural variety of the BrazelBerries Collection, is one of Annand’s favorite compact shrubs. Hardy to Zone 5, Raspberry Shortcake boasts self-fertile berries and stalks that don’t need staking. A dense, compact shrub that gets only about 2–3 feet tall and wide, Raspberry Shortcake is perfect for containers.

Amy Daniel of Fall Creek recommends keeping as many canes as possible to maximize fruit production. Since fruit develops on both new canes and canes that have had a round of winter dormancy, “cut out only the dead canes,” she advised.

Another compact blueberry to join the collection is Blueberry Glaze™.

“Beautiful, simple and delicious: I love this amazing shrub,” Daniel said.

In the garden, this 2–3-foot blueberry can be easily sheared like boxwood into a small hedge. In addition to beautiful seasonal shows, Blueberry Glaze has the added benefit of a harvest of delicious, dark blue fruit that is high in healthy antioxidants.

The attractive shrub is hardy to Zone 5. It looks great and produces a delicious crop — in containers, too.

Daniel said that Blueberry Glaze has already generated so much interest and is selling so well in the Pacific Northwest that sufficient numbers of plants are not yet available. Garden centers are lining up customers on waiting lists, particularly in areas with lots of condo dwellers.

The super-dwarf Jelly Bean™, also part of the BrazelBerries Collection, is another favorite of Daniel. Jelly Bean combines exceptional hardiness (to Zone 4) with diminutive form (1–2 feet) and a prolific crop of large, flavorful blueberries. Plants set fruit in the interior of the shrub where they are less obvious to birds, and they make a great little hedge, Daniel said.

Another BrazelBerries selection, Peach Sorbet™ offers four seasons of interest and an abundant crop of sweet summer berries. Spring foliage arrives in delicious colors of peach, pink, orange and green, and in most climates goes to a rich purple and stays on year-round. At 1½–2 feet and hardy to Zone 5, the compact mound performs in many situations.

A compact selection of evergreen huckleberry called Scarlet Ovation™ made an appearance in the New Varieties Showcase at the 2013 Farwest Show. *Vaccinium ovatum* ‘Vacsid 1’ PPAF, CPBRAf was selected and introduced by Sidhu & Sons Nursery Ltd., B.C., Canada. The 3-foot evergreen shrub has growth that is more consistently dense and compact than its native parent. It produces bright bronzy-red spring foliage and is hardy to Zone 7.

And the hits keep coming. Fall



**Raspberry Shortcake sports thornless canes and has a compact growth habit that thrives in patio pots.**

PHOTO COURTESY OF FALL CREEK FARM AND NURSERY INC.



*Hypericum androsaceum* 'Snopszam' — Snow Splash, for short — offers a lot of appeal in a 2-foot by 2-foot plant. Variegated green leaves are brushed with cream and pink. After flowering, berries take on hues of yellow, pink, red and purple-black. PHOTO COURTESY OF LCN SELECTIONS

Creek introduced another compact blueberry, Pink Icing™ (*Vaccinium corymbosum* 'Pink Icing'), in the 2014 New Varieties Showcase at Farwest. Its color-shifting foliage ranges from pink to green to blue to turquoise. It is well suited for containers as well as hedges.

#### For fabulous ornamental value

Even without food production, some new compact shrubs are simply great garden plants for outstanding beauty and ease of care. Ken McVicker, sales manager for Van Essen Nursery in Lebanon, Oregon, narrowed down the options at the nursery to four new compact shrubs he considers exceptional.

For one, McVicker highly recommends a real show stopper, *Berberis thunbergii* 'Admiration'. A selection from PlantHaven, it has been on the market for a few years, but it literally ▶

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“stopped customers in their tracks at IGC and the Farwest Show,” McVicker said. “We sell a lot,” he said, and the nursery has around 30,000 in #1 and #2 containers for their customers.

With a very compact, tidy habit (1–2 feet) and vibrant coral-red leaves edged with gold, ‘Admiration’ “glows in the landscape,” McVicker said. Hardy to Zone 5, it requires little to no pruning, takes full sun and develops burgundy fall color.

An exceptional new plant that hit the retail market in 2013 is a striking hypericum from LCN Selections called

Snow Splash™ (*Hypericum androsaecum* ‘Snopszam’). It is a tidy, mounded shrub with unique variegated foliage. Green leaves brushed with cream take on pink and burgundy hues in fall. “I’ve never seen anything like it,” McVicker said.

In the prime growing conditions of Oregon’s Willamette Valley, Snow Splash gets up to 3 feet tall and wide, but in harsher climates it will stay smaller, probably only 2 feet. Hardy to Zone 5, the well-behaved plant produces yellow flowers with colorful calyxes and berries.

Van Essen is in the process of building numbers of Snow Splash, but has it

available in #2 pots now.

For winter or Christmas decoration, small gardens or borders, McVicker recommends a new *Leucothoe* from PlantHaven: *Leucothoe axillaris* ‘Curly Red’. At only 16–18 inches, the slow grower is popular in Europe as a potted gift plant. The compact evergreen shrub has curly ruffled leaves that are burgundy red in lower light; in more sun, they turn green with yellow and red highlights. Van Essen offers Curly Red, which is hardy to Zone 6, in #1 and #2 pots.

Finally, Van Essen brought a noteworthy new *Physocarpus* called Caramel Candy® to the market. The first of Ball Ornamentals’ upcoming series of very dwarf ninebarks, *Physocarpus opulifolius* ‘Podaras 2’ gets only 2–3 feet with rich, caramel-colored foliage and white blooms in spring. Very hardy to Zone 3 with exfoliating bark, this exciting new plant was made available in #3 containers initially.

Lisa Annand finds that *Loropetalum* is always a big hit with her clients, many of whom aren’t familiar with it. “The new variety ‘Crimson Fire’ is going to make it even easier to find just the right place in the garden,” she said.

Evergreen *Loropetalum chinense* var. *rubrum* ‘Crimson Fire’ has a mounding habit with ruby red foliage on a plant that only gets 2–3 feet tall and wide. Striking neon-pink spring flowers compliment the fabulous foliage. From Plant Introductions Inc., ‘Crimson Fire’ is hardy to Zone 7. It is a stunning foundation plant or focal point; planted above a wall, it will drape luxuriously, Annand said.

Two new compact shrubs from Youngblood Nursery in Salem, Oregon, offer designers additional options. *Coprosma* ‘Inferno’ PPAF, a tender shrub that was introduced at Farwest’s New Varieties Showcase in 2013, is a departure from the nursery’s usual hardy selections. But the exciting mix of coloration and habit made the specimen a premium container plant worth trying, according to Chris Steinke, a plantsman at Youngblood.

Red and brick red join the more



***Leucothoe* ‘Curly Red’ is exceptionally hardy. Its thick, leathery and curly leaves keep their color during the winter, making it a fantastic plant for winter containers. PHOTO COURTESY OF PLANTHAVEN INTERNATIONAL INC.**

# The Cure for the Common Black Pot.

standard yellow and green leaf variegation, and the compact, upright habit needs no pruning or staking. From Ball Ornamentals, the plant is rated for hardiness in Zones 9–11 with an expected height of 3–4 feet and width of 2–3 feet, Steinke said.

*Lonicera* 'Little Lemon Zest' PPAF made its appearance the following season. Youngblood has exclusive rights to liners for the new, dwarf selection from LCN Selections.

## For flowers

For flowering compact shrubs, the new, smaller hydrangeas are among Annand's favorites.

"Hydrangeas are often on my clients' wish list," she said. "I love the paniculata varieties for their ability to take full sun and their large showy panicles. But not everyone has the space that they require," she said.

In smaller spaces, Annand uses a more compact selection called White Diamonds™ (*Hydrangea paniculata* 'HYPMADI'), a striking variety with a dense mounding habit and white panicles summer through fall.

"All that beauty on a 4-foot tall, 5-foot wide *Hydrangea paniculata*," Annand said. "It is a lovely addition to mixed borders."

An even more compact *H. paniculata* introduction joined the First Editions® Collection from Bailey Nurseries Inc. in spring 2014. Called Strawberry Sundae™ (*H. p.* 'Rensun' PPAF), it has a very compact, uniform habit that makes it an excellent option for small gardens. About half the size of the popular Vanilla Strawberry™ (*H. p.* 'Renhy' PPAF), Strawberry Sundae produces the same creamy white panicles on new stems. As night temperatures start to cool, the panicles change color, first to pink, then to strawberry red and finally to burgundy.

"The flowers are fantastic for filling vases, and Strawberry Sundae will be a sweet, summer-blooming addition to smaller gardens," Annand said. It takes full to part sun in Zones 4–8, and grows to about 4–5 feet tall and 3–4 feet wide. ▶



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Bailey Nurseries also has a new addition to the Endless Summer® Collection of reblooming hydrangeas. Called BloomStruck™ (*H. macrophylla* 'PIIHM-II' PPAF), it is a seedling selection by Dr. Michael Dirr that boasts a constant show of colorful, 3½–5-inch blooms on extremely sturdy, red-purple stems. Bloom color depends on soil pH, but red petioles and glossy, dark green foliage with red veins add to an outstanding show. Red-purple fall foliage on the rounded shrub produces a dramatic seasonal show. Best in part-shade, it gets about 3–4 feet tall and 4–5 feet wide in Zones 4–9. ☺



BloomStruck hydrangea combines beauty and hardiness, with its extremely strong stems, heat tolerance and disease resistance — especially to powdery mildew. PHOTO COURTESY OF BAILEY NURSERIES INC.

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