

Trees and Shrubs - Descriptions, Strengths and Problems

In this section I describe the best plants for zone 3. This will not be an exhaustive list; specifically, it includes the hardiest plants with the least problems and the easiest to maintain. These are the trees and shrubs that form the solid base, the bones of zone 3 gardens.

The temptation when discussing woody plants for the garden is to be exhaustive, and try to cover every variety of every species ever grown in your area or zone. With Canadian winters being what they are, my focus is the hardiest, those with the least problems, those that rarely let you down.



What follows are my favorite woody plants, mainly because they are the toughest and easiest to work with. I do appreciate people who wrap and insulate, and sometimes even add additional heat, but most of us want to put the garden to bed for the winter and let it be. There is a very practical side to having garden plants that are hardy in your zone. You know there is a very good chance that with proper care and watering practices, especially a fall watering, that your chosen plants will get through the winter with no problems and once the snow melts and the garden wakes up for another year they will be ready to go.

Exotic introductions are always fascinating and we all want to try something new, but those fringe plants are not included here; perhaps that can be another book. Why wrestle with constant winter die-back or plants that attract too many insect or disease problems. The plants included are the tough plants. There is more than enough variety here and many interesting planting combinations can be attained.

I describe plants from each genus, including their growth characteristics, pruning details and the culture of growing them, then follow up with the most common disease and insect considerations. The best plants of each genus will be mentioned. Knowing the genus and how they grow is an important step in the education of every gardener. It is nice to know the names and habits of every plant but that can take a lot of time.

In the meantime, knowing how the genus behaves is an important first step and, as an example, once you have a good understanding of spruce trees, you will know that they share many common traits as to their watering, pruning, insect and disease problems.

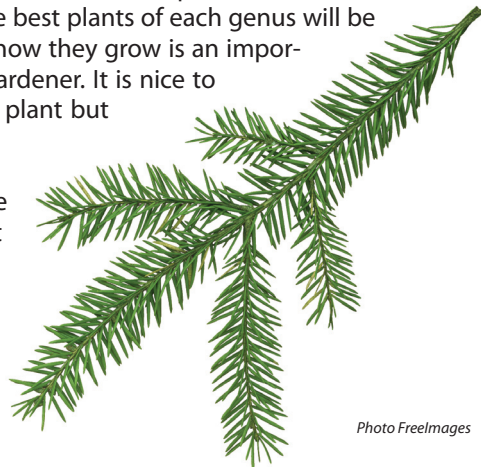


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Ash

Ash (*Fraxinus*, not the mountain ash *Sorbus*) are an important group of eastern forest hardwoods. Slowly advancing westward after the last ice age, the green ash is native as far west as the beautiful rolling ranch country of southern Saskatchewan. The tree is naturalized there, mainly the result of the annual prolific seed output from the female trees.

Ash are dioecious plants, with male and female flowers on separate trees. The single winged seeds have an excellent germination rate. You will often find ash volunteers in hidden and neglected spots.

A stalwart westerner, the ash has commonly been used as a shelter belt tree on many prairie farmsteads. In the city it has been used as a street tree from the beginning and the many giant trees in the older neighborhoods are a pleasure to see. The ash is quite drought resistant with a deeper than average root system, which I learned the hard way by once digging one up. It will thrive rather than just survive if watered properly, but not without a few problems. Ash are seriously tough trees. Western ash bark beetles can prey heavily; looking back to the early 90s we had a serious infestation in our city (Calgary) and many weak trees were killed. The adult female beetle overwinters in the ground and in spring crawls up the tree to lay her eggs in the upper branches. The larvae need energy and they eat a series of tunnels under the bark. Their feeding activity usually extends around the branch, girdling it. Once cut off from its water and nutrient source, the branch dies. You can easily spot larva feeding in their galleries by a sap stain, a dark stain on the bark. I have used this staining to easily identify which branches to prune out. If we do have another population spike, Tanglefoot banding (a sticky insect barrier compound) is one way of catching the females as they ascend.

Ash trees are to a much lesser degree affected by the ash plant bug, a sap sucker of leaves. It will impart white spots to the leaves. Another uncommon affliction is the fungus called ash yellows.



Green ash