

POTOMAC GREENS

Recommended Replacement Plants (amended and revised, March 2023); with

Tips for Successful Planting and Establishment

KEY: S=Sun, PS=Partial Sun, SH=Shade

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Recommended Replacement Plants

ORNAMENTAL TREES

Bloodgood Japanese Maple S/PS
Japanese Cutleaf Maple PS
Dwarf Crape Myrtles S
'Okame' Cherry S
Amelanchier 'Autumn Brilliance' PS/SH
'Jane' Magnolia S
Kousa Dogwood PS
Lilac (Common Purple, and other smaller varieties) S
Ornamental Acers (various, in color and size/shape: purple, red, green foliage) S/PS

EVERGREEN SHRUBS

'Otto Luyken' Cherry Laurel PS/SH (NB, many of these were planted when PG was built, often in rather inadequate builders' soil. They are not faring well in the extreme heat of recent summers, esp. in full sun; if you plant replacements, it is preferable to put them in in the Fall, well before the frosts; if planting in Spring, choose smaller plants, enrich the soil with leaf compost, and water very attentively in the first season.)

Effective alternatives to Laurel:

Various types of larger Euonymus (S/PS/SH) can serve as attractive bushes or hedges and can also be trimmed into shapes: e.g., Green Boxwood, Burning Bush and (variegated) Golden Euonymus. Check what height and width the type of Euonymus grows to before purchasing for your particular spot: more compact, and esp. variegated Euonymus is very effective in beds as a background to other seasonal plants.

Hollies: Dwarf Burford's (S/PS/SH) are to be recommended as fast growers, coping well with heat (avoid the non-dwarf type, which rapidly becomes a large hedge); they also berry well and can be trimmed into box-ball shapes. They do well in the difficult, dry, small beds behind the garages. (NB, the previously recommended Blue Holly and Japanese Holly are now difficult to establish and support in the new summer heats. We can no longer recommend them.)

'Wintergem'/ 'Wintergreen' Boxwood (S/PS): usually trimmed into box-ball shapes. These are ubiquitous in PG from the earliest plantings, but now require more watering and attention than in the past, especially while getting established. Nonetheless they remain a staple and very reliable under the right conditions of care.

Nandina Domestica (S/PS/SH) and Dwarf Nandina: 'Firepower', 'GulfStream' (S/PS/SH). Easy to grow and provide red berry colour in the winter months (though beware that the berries are poisonous). Require strong annual pruning in early spring to avoid 'legginess'.

Camellia Japonica (Spring flowering) PS/SH

Camellia Sasanqua (Fall flowering) PS/SH

Camellias provide delightful color at these times but require careful watering attention, otherwise they 'brown' at their edges when dry.

DECIDUOUS SHRUBS

Hydrangeas of several sorts and flower-colors (including 'standardized' forms) fare well in PG overall, but now need a considerable amount of watering, as well as careful pruning in the Spring. S/PS/SH

Viburnum tinus (including variegatum forms), with different-colored flowers: check for full grown size before purchasing. S/PS

Spiraea Gold Mound, with pink flowers. S/PS

Berberis ('Barberry'), of different sizes and colors: pink, dark red, varieties are attractive in the Summer and Fall months, but choose a sunny spot, and pay attention to whether you choose a dwarf or larger variety, depending on your available space. S/PS

GROUNDCOVER

Liriope variegata is the ground cover in most of our PG 'tree boxes' (which technically belong to the city of Alexandria): purple 'spike' flowers in late Summer. Needs good watering to establish in first season at least. S/PS/SH

Dead nettle (lamium), various types, including an attractive variegated one, flower in spring and survive well in cold Winters and hot Summers. S/PS

Pachysandra terminalis (including an attractive variegated form): slow-growing but will establish well eventually. Yellow flowers in Spring/early Summer. Dogs are averse to this plant.

Various ivies (green or variegated) and Vincas (green or variegated, miniature or not, with blue flowers in Spring): plant these only with care and an eye to control, since they can become invasive.

ATTRACTIVE PLANTS for DARK SPOTS (PS/S)

There are some houses in PG which have *very* shaded garden plots because of surrounding trees. It may be useful to know which shrubs and plants will fare well in these plots:

Otto Luyken Laurels (see above) may do better here than in other, hotter, spots. Euonymus will also fare well, but without much sun, variegated versions may revert to green.

Helibores of different types and colored flowers do well in shade: white, pink and purple flowers emerge in Spring or (in some types) even before the Holiday season.

Hostas: these die back in late Fall but emerge again from the ground in Spring. Many attractive varieties in blue/green, yellow/green, or white/green. Flower stalks (pink, purple) come in later Summer.

Ferns: different varieties are available, greens or silvery/deep red. Pay attention to plant instructions about soil, watering, etc.

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Tips for Successful Planting and Establishment

Various local plant sellers may supply useful leaflets on 'Planting Trees and Shrubs': they are worth picking up and following in their advice, esp. those specific to particular plants. Here we offer basic advice which applies overall.

1. When you are choosing trees, shrubs and other plants for your plot, bear in mind that *three* crucial factors will affect your success with them: i. The choice of the right plants for the geographic *orientation* of your plot, and consequent level of sun and shade (see above); ii. The appropriate quality of your *soil*, and its need for regular replenishment with compost, annual fertilizer or other enrichment; iii. The necessary supply of *water* for your plant's flourishing, especially in the first one or two seasons of planting, but also thereafter.
2. After you have decided on appropriate trees and plants for your plot (again, see above), assess the quality of your existing *soil*. Almost all areas of PG were left with basic 'builder's soil' after construction, which – alas - is in no way positively supportive of plant life long-term; in addition, many areas of PG have a layer of problematic and impenetrable clay not very far from the surface. So start by doing some digging and assessment to see what challenges you are up against: nothing is beyond hope and transformation in gardening, but some lots may need more prior enrichment for shrubs and plants to flourish. And in others, you may need to adjust your choice of shrubs and plants to make sure that things go well for them.
3. The best outcomes for trees, shrubs and other plants come from appropriate *planting*. Several factors are important in this process. First, soak your ready-for-planting purchases well in water (if necessary, submerging pots in a large bucket or equivalent for an hour or two) while you prepare your soil. Second, dig a hole for your plant which is somewhat deeper than your plant, and dispose of any rocks, stones or roots which are impeding the space. Third, amend your soil in accordance with any instructions that come with the plant, which may include a good ratio of leaf mould (this is one of the best fertilizing agents) and perhaps some small amount of 'root booster' which you may buy from gardening stores. But even if no instructions come with the plant, leaf-mould is always beneficial as a soil-enricher. (Do not *over-fertilize*,

however, because you can kill or deplete the flowering potential of plants in the process.) Third, prepare your ‘root-ball’, if relevant, since plants grown in pots can be ‘pot-bound’ when you take them out of their pots: you will need to ensure that the roots can spread out in their new habitat by gently scoring through pot-bound roots to allow them to expand and grow. Fourth, now place your shrub or plant in its new hole, and confirm that the top of it is *slightly* higher than ground level, but the underneath is well supported by your good quality soil-and-leaf-mould mixture. Fill in your hole and gently firmly press down on all sides so that plant is safely ‘placed’ and securely oriented. Finally, water immediately and very thoroughly, preferably using a gentle watering wand or hose to shower the entire root ball and whole planting area at the base (do not water at the top of the plant). Generally speaking, you will need to water a 10 inch diameter around the plant to saturate the root zone and surrounding soil – this could take 3-5 minutes.

[N.B. A *caveat*: Even very expensive local professional gardening centers do not always follow these basic planting rules. Often they do not dig holes deep enough, nor do they check or adjust the soil, nor do they water efficiently after planting. They ‘cover’ themselves with a guarantee, which makes the plants twice the cost they ought to be – because they expect to have to replace them! Aim to avoid these dangers, either by planting yourself, or monitoring carefully what is happening when the ‘professional’ planting occurs.]

4. Success hereafter depends almost entirely on a good *watering* schedule, especially in the crucial first year of a new plant’s life in PG, and in hot and humid weather. We are now encountering unprecedented heat globally, and no less here in PG. Thunderstorms do not necessarily help (after long periods of dryness) because the rainwater rushes off the top of the soil rather than sinking in. Especially with newly planted shrubs and plants, you will need to water daily in these hot-weather periods, aiming for the roots rather than the tops of the plants. You may be much helped in this work by installing an inexpensive hose with a timer and outlets; or you may decide to opt for a sprinkler installation, which will come with an app on your phone and many options for different timings and weather-conditions. Otherwise, good-hearted neighbors often assist in PG when their friends are away! Each house has one or two spigots for garden hoses (which need to be drained in late Fall, before the frosts).

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