

## Bring Back These Heirloom Shrubs



*Photo by David W. Marshall, UF/Leon County IFAS Extension: Glossy abelia is one of several very durable heirloom shrubs for our area.*

*Linda H. Yates is a Master Gardener volunteer with the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Leon County and a member of its Horticultural Advisory Committee.*

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**I**t is time homeowners bring three distinctively southern shrubs back to their gardens. Old enough to be classified as heirloom plants, they seem to have been passed over for newer, flashier shrubs with strange sounding names such as loropetalum and fuzzy deutzia.

One of the most over-looked summer flowering shrubs is the abelia. It is attractive year-round with shiny evergreen leaves, a graceful growth habit three to six feet, depending on the variety, and a constant display of small trumpet-like flowers from early summer to late fall. Butterflies and bumblebees flit around the flowers, moving aside just long enough for you to cut a few branches for a floral arrangement.

Abelias are named for Dr. Clark Abel, a British physician who served his country's embassy to China in the early 1800s. Edward Goucher of Glen Dale, Maryland, hybridized a cultivar from Abel's abelias in 1911. If you find abelia at a local nursery it will probably be one of two varieties most often grown here, either 'Edward Goucher' or 'Grandiflora.' 'Edward Goucher' has deep pink flowers and grows from three to six feet. 'Grandiflora' has white flowers and may grow as tall as eight feet. It would make a good background border plant or may be pruned to conform to its spot in the landscape. There are several other cultivars also. Most are winter hardy and evergreen here.

Planting abelias in full sun will make them bloom more but they also do well in part shade. Average soil meets their needs.

If your mother or grandmother had a banana shrub in her garden, you will never forget the delight you, as a child, had picking its tiny banana-shaped flowers and knotting them in a handkerchief to carry their fragrance around with you.

The banana shrub, named for its banana-like fragrance and flowers, was introduced to the United States in the 1700's from China. It is one of the classic evergreen shrubs of the South and grows in conditions similar to

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camellias and azaleas. The evergreen shrub will eventually grow to 15 feet but responds well to pruning to a rounded open form. Scale insect is a common pest, causing spots on the leaves. Yet the plant is not usually harmed enough by the scale to require spraying with an insecticidal oil.

It grows in sun or shade and may be used as a specimen accent plant or as a hedge. Even though its flowers look like bananas, they are not edible. Plant one for its beauty, its fragrance, as an under-story tree for birds, and to make childhood memories!

The third heirloom shrub that needs greater use is the spirea. It is such a winner it is still being used in many landscapes. It is one of the easiest shrubs to grow and one of the first to bloom in early spring.

Two kinds include the classic Bridal Wreath spirea, a deciduous broadleaf variety that can grow six feet or higher and has white small clusters of flowers, and the Baby's Breath spirea, a showy, graceful shrub of three to five feet and white blossoms. There is also a Japanese spirea with flat clusters of pink flowers.

Any of these will brighten up a corner of your garden whether in sun or partial shade. They will tolerate any soil unless it is very wet. They like mulch around them and some watering in dry periods.

The shrub produces numerous canes that provide winter interest when its leaves are gone. Pruning is done by pruning off older canes at ground level.

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