

## Species Spotlight: The Blackhaw Viburnum

It's almost that time of year.... leaf peeping season! The garden will be an array of hues and textures, so make sure you stop by for a visit in the next two months. There are so many colorful candidates to choose from in the Garden, but one superstar tree stands out for its beautiful foliage, habitat value, and general versatility. *Viburnum prunifolium*, or 'blackhaw viburnum,' is a member of the Caprifoliaceae family whose native range stretches from Texas up through New York. Standing about 12 to 15 feet tall by 6 to 12 feet wide, blackhaws can be found scattered throughout woodland stretches, established as ornamental plants, or even utilized in hedges.

The blackhaw can be a multi-stemmed shrub or single-stemmed tree, and its habit is typically a dense, rounded form composed of many twigs. Its leaves are ovate with subtly serrated edges, transitioning from shiny dark green in the summer to a vibrant mix of purple and red in the fall. As if its foliage isn't striking enough, this viburnum also boasts large clusters of fragrant white flowers in mid-spring, followed by elegant blue-black berries in the autumn months. The young grey stem matures to a plated, almost black bark. This feature, coupled with its general resemblance to the hawthorn, is why *Viburnum prunifolium* has been lovingly dubbed the 'blackhaw'.

The blackhaw is capable of thriving in most conditions, including sun or shade, urban or rural sites, and damp or dry soil. If you want to achieve the best fall color, however, place your blackhaw in full sun. Be careful not to mix up this viburnum with others; people frequently mistake the nannyberry viburnum for the blackhaw viburnum, although the blackhaw far surpasses the nannyberry in both autumn vibrancy and crown density. The blackhaw has been popular since its introduction in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when its root bark was used medicinally by Native Americans. It is a star member of its ecosystem and provides food and refuge to butterflies, bees, moths, squirrels, and chipmunks, amongst others. Another perk is that humans can also enjoy the tasty berries it produces, eating them straight off the tree or using them to make delicious preserves. Whatever might draw you to the Garden, be sure to keep an eye out for the blackhaw's brilliant foliage this autumn as you revel in your walk through the mosaic of trees.

Sources:

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