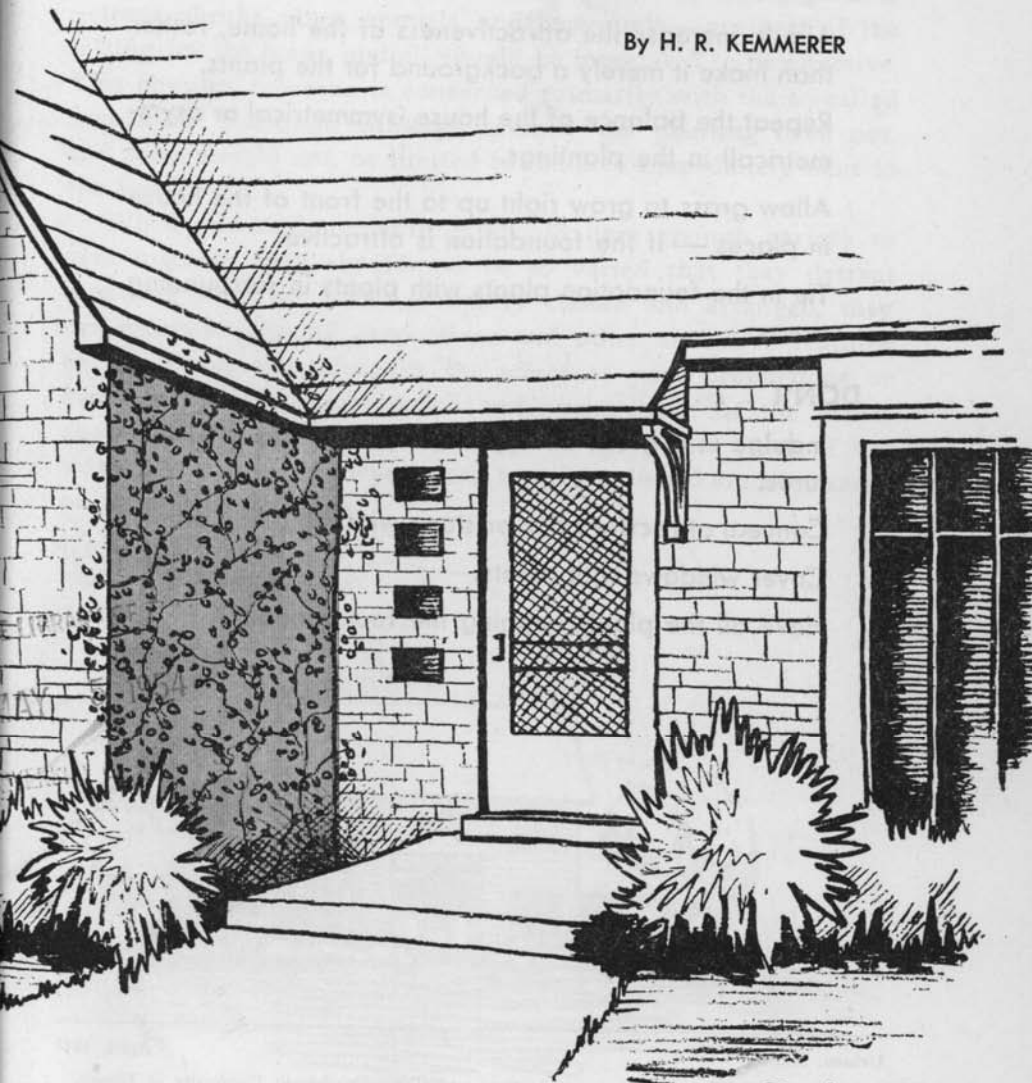


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# FOUNDATION PLANTINGS

By H. R. KEMMERER



Circular 720

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS · COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE  
EXTENSION SERVICE IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS

## FOR BEST RESULTS —

### DO . . .

Aim to increase the attractiveness of the home, rather than make it merely a background for the plants.

Repeat the balance of the house (symmetrical or asymmetrical) in the plantings.

Allow grass to grow right up to the front of the house in places — if the foundation is attractive.

Tie in the foundation plants with plants in surrounding areas.

### DON'T . . .

Indulge in a great variety of shapes, colors, and textures.

Conceal attractive brick or stone with too many plants.

Cover windows with plants.

Have all the plants hugging the foundation.

# FOUNDATION PLANTINGS

By H. R. KEMMERER, Extension Specialist in Landscape Gardening

**F**OUNDATION PLANTINGS are meant to tie in the house with its surroundings and make of the whole a picture worthy of framing. Actually all the plants on the home grounds — trees, shrubs, vines, annuals, and perennials — are part of the setting for the home, and all should be integrated to be effective. This circular, however, is concerned primarily with the so-called foundation plantings although actually the planting need not, and often should not, be limited to the area immediately next to the foundation.

While foundation plantings should have enough variety to give interest, they should not be so varied that they detract attention from the house. Properly chosen and arranged, they can enhance pleasing proportions and other attractive features of the home, and minimize the effect of poor proportions or awkward detail. The selection and arrangement of the plants should be appropriate to the design of the home. Some of the ways in which these purposes can be accomplished are illustrated on the following pages.

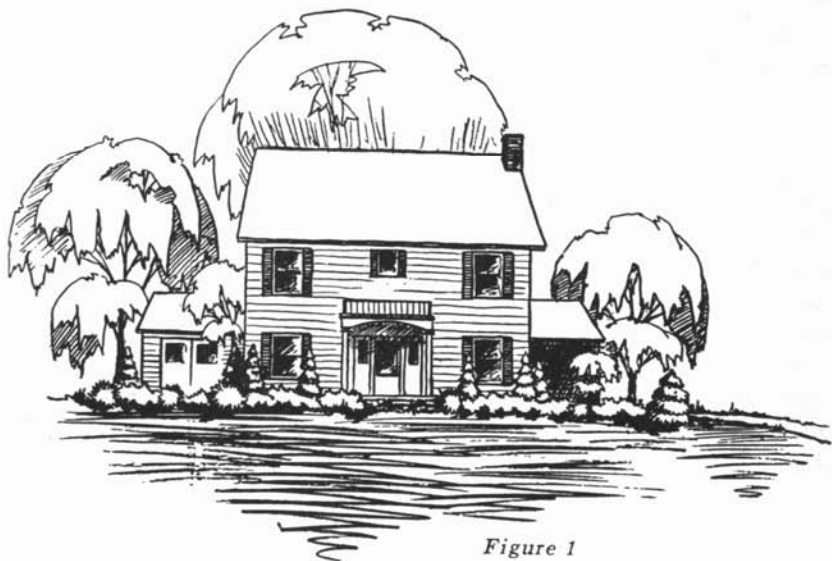


Figure 1

Accent the Good Details . . .  
Camouflage the Poor Ones



Figure 2

Good choice and arrangement of foundation plantings starts with a careful study of the home. Does your house have an especially attractive feature that deserves accenting? Or does it have awkward features that should be screened? Plants chosen for these specific purposes can then be tied in with other plantings to form one unified, harmonious setting.

Figure 2 shows how an attractive entrance can be accented with appropriate plantings. The low and simple planting is desirable because it serves only to help accent the entrance and does not itself become the center of attraction.

If the entrance isn't attractive, plants can be arranged to make it appear more inviting, as in Figure 3. Here we see how shrubs can soften and screen out unattractive steps and add interest to the doorway.

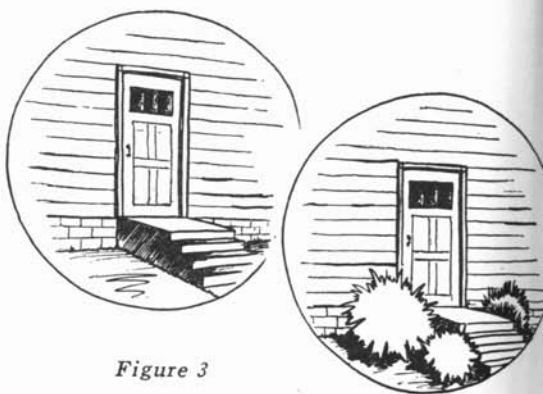


Figure 3



Figure 4

Irregularities in the roof line of the above house (*Figure 4*) have been screened out with two tall plants. These plants also serve to soften the "afterthought" effect that is given by the small porch.

It shouldn't be obvious that plants are meant to screen out undesirable features — otherwise, they defeat their own purpose. You can avoid obviousness by tying such plants in with other plants, and also by using a group that will spread beyond the feature to be screened. In *Figure 4*, the screening plants have been made part of one continuous planting, and another tall plant has been put at the corner of the house to balance them.

Plants don't necessarily have to provide a solid screen in front of the undesirable feature. Actually, better results are obtained when only the direct view to the feature is intercepted, as in *Figure 5*. The planting serves to soften both the high foundation and the angle of porch and wall.

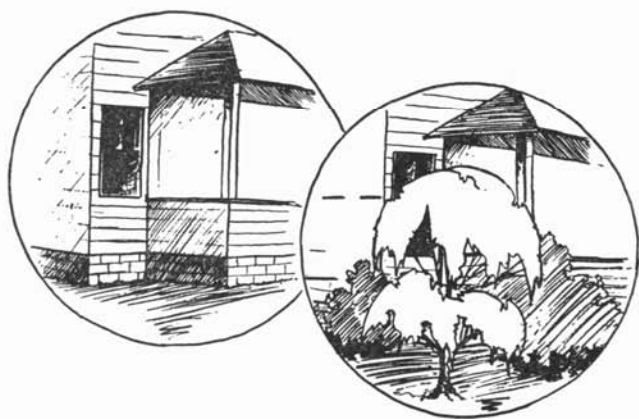


Figure 5

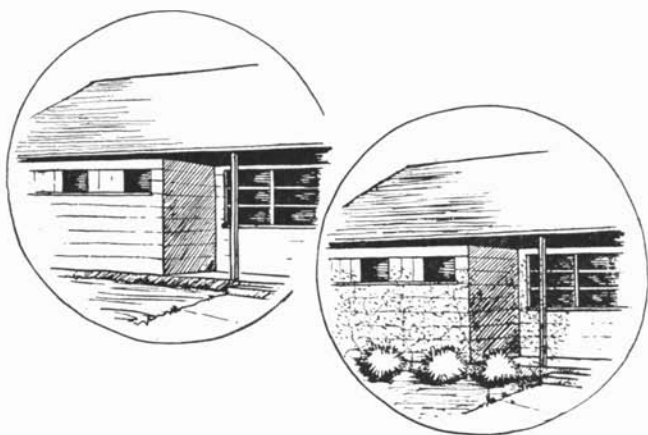


Figure 6

Large expanses of siding material can be softened with vines, as shown in *Figure 6*. It isn't good, however, to have an unbroken stretch solidly covered with foliage.

### Be Guided by the Balance of the House

In *Figure 7* we see a symmetrically designed home. The windows and the architectural arrangement are identical on each side of an imaginary line drawn through the middle of the house. This balance has been repeated in the plantings, so that they and the house give the same basic effect. With a home like this, the concave arrangement of the plants is much more effective than when the tall plants are in the center and the lower ones are at the corners. Note that the center plants are connected with the corner plants by low-spreading shrubs.



Figure 7



Figure 8

Sometimes we have a home which is symmetrically designed except for one or two features. This is true of the house shown in *Figure 8*—the front windows, of course, not being alike. We can, however, assume that such a house is symmetrical and carry out the plantings in that manner.

Again the plantings have a concave arrangement, with low evergreens in the center. The solid planting of evergreens along the front screens out the high foundation. However, nothing but evergreens in front of a house is monotonous; so to give some variety the tall plants at the corners are deciduous shrubs. The evergreens in front of them have several advantages: They hide any legginess the shrubs may have, and also conceal the foundation more effectively than would deciduous shrubs alone. Also, since they continue out from the corners of the house, they tie in the house and foundation plantings with the yard. Without these plantings extending out from the corners, the transition from yard to house would be too abrupt.

Symmetrical design is usually associated with formality. But some modern houses that are symmetrically designed still give an informal effect, as is illustrated by the house shown in *Figure 9*. Completely symmetrical plantings would be too formal for this



Figure 9

house. Instead, some of the plants — those beneath the windows on either side of the door — have been arranged symmetrically, while the rest of the plants are in an asymmetrical arrangement that reflects the basic informality of the home.

A pyramidal evergreen at each corner of the house, for example, would be too stiff and formal. As it is, the one pyramidal evergreen serves to catch the eye and lead it on to the rest of the front of the house. This tree might be an Upright Japanese Yew or any of the vertical types of junipers. The Canaert Redcedar is also desirable because it has a horizontal branching habit which tends to repeat the horizontal line of the house and thus keep the eye low.

The two plants between the pyramidal tree and the plantings by the entrance serve to provide interest and a little bit of variation along the front of the house.

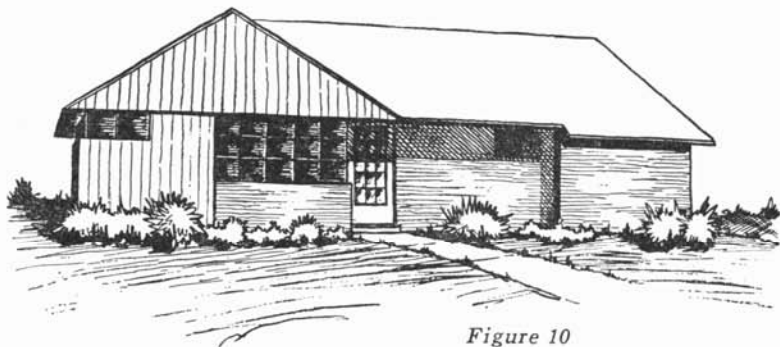


Figure 10

The informal, asymmetrically designed homes pictured in *Figures 10* and *11* call for asymmetrical plantings. Simplicity is the keynote, particularly in the arrangement shown above.

Note that the main plantings in *Figure 10* consist simply of an evergreen to the right of the entrance, a clump of evergreens at the right corner, and another larger clump in front of the frame section of the house. In this grouping one of the plants is a little bigger than the others. Plantings beneath the windows and at the right center tie together the main plantings.

The variation in the height of the plants adds interest. At the same time they are all low enough that, together, they repeat the horizontal line of the house and keep the eye at a low level. The entire arrangement is of such a nature that the house itself stands out rather than just the plantings.





Figure 11

The basic planting before the house in Figure 11 is the low hedge between the garage and the entrance. The horizontal line of the hedge repeats the horizontal line of the house. This could be a formally sheared hedge, but with an informal type of house like this one it is better to have simply a group of plants all of the same type. They not only carry out the informality of the house but also demand less maintenance. A flowering shrub, such as the Anthony Waterer spirea, would be a good choice.

The rest of the planting is very simple. There is a low planting beneath the window on the left-hand side with one larger plant on the corner to provide interest and soften the corner line. The small tree next to the entrance helps to soften the front and also reduce the effect of all the indentations and extensions on the house. (A redbud might be a good tree in this position.) The little shrub directly beneath the tree provides interest to a person coming up the walk, which is immediately behind the hedge.

The setting is completed with the little group of plants along the drive. The primary purpose of these shrubs is to extend the plantings out from the foundation of the house and tie the house in with the surrounding area. Lawn, plants, and house all become one unit instead of giving the impression that here is a lawn and then a house with some plants around it.

### Repeat Pleasing Proportions

In each of the asymmetrical arrangements illustrated on these two pages, a horizontal planting has repeated the horizontal line of a low, one-story house.

Similarly, we would want to use a tall, pyramidal tree, such as a spruce or a pin oak, to repeat the vertical lines of a tall house. When two tall objects—a tall house and a tall tree—are side by side, neither looks overly tall. However, nothing but low plants around a tall house may make it look even taller.



Figure 12

Note that in *Figure 12* the pyramidal plant is not directly in front of the house but is off to one side. The continued planting from the house to and beyond the evergreen ties the two together and makes one effective setting.

### Modify Unpleasing Proportions

Occasionally a low house may look too long in proportion to its surroundings — especially when it is on a small lot with many other houses close to it. The proper choice and arrangements of plants, however, can make such a house look shorter.

The low pyramidal evergreen by the entrance of the house in *Figure 13* breaks the long front in two and thus reduces the apparent length. A deciduous shrub would serve the purpose just as well; the main thing to watch is that it be somewhat stiff rather than a wide-spreading type.

Incidentally, the pyramidal evergreen serves to accent the entrance as well as decrease the length of the house. With this informal, asymmetrically designed home, it would not be desirable to have an upright plant on both sides of the entrance. The low-spreading shrub to the right of the door provides the necessary balance.

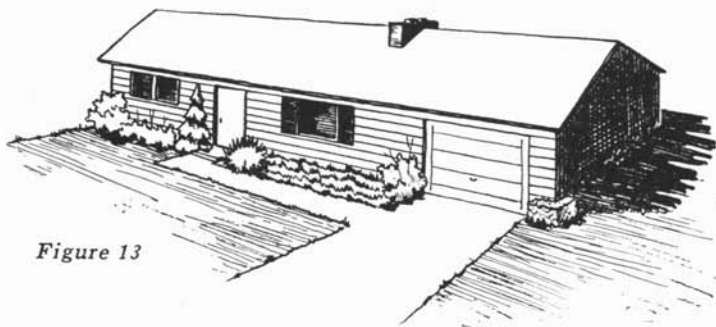


Figure 13



Figure 14

The house shown in *Figure 14* is much too tall for its width. In the sketch at the left, the pyramidal evergreens right next to the house make it look even taller and narrower. Not only do they emphasize the vertical lines, but the tree in the center tends to cut the house in half.

The sketch at the right shows how the same house can be broadened with the right kind of plantings. The mass effect produced by the two tall plants reduces the sharpness of the corner lines. The low-spreading plants extending along the side of the house and beyond the corners provide a continuous low mass which catches the eye and keeps attention away from the height of the house. A tall pyramidal or wide-branching tree some distance from the corner would also help to minimize the impression of height.

While the proportions of the house in *Figure 15* are not unpleasing, it does give rather an overpowering effect of height.



Figure 15

Not only is the house tall, but it is built on a high foundation, and in addition is situated on a terrace. This effect can be reduced by putting the usual type of foundation planting along the front of the house. The planting is rather formal, which is in keeping with the formality of the house. In addition, a low hedge, longer than the house, runs along the top of the terrace, leaving a strip of grass between the hedge and the foundation planting. This arrangement gives a large amount of mass close to the ground, balancing the effect of height. Another value of the hedge is that it softens the angle of the terrace.



Figure 16

Sometimes a home with generally pleasing proportions has one or more features that dominate the rest of the house. In *Figure 16*, for example, the large vertical chimney is somewhat overpowering.

With such a situation it isn't feasible to try to screen out the chimney. The best plan is to reduce its dominance by repeating the vertical line, as has been done with the tall shrub immediately to the right of the chimney. The other plantings around the house are very simple, with a planting on each corner and a few low shrubs next to the vertical plant to help soften it and avoid the appearance that it is just one isolated plant.

Part of the foundation has been left exposed, with grass running right up to it. When you have an attractive brick or stone home or a frame house with only a four- or five-inch foundation, it is much more appealing to leave a portion of the foundation exposed than to have grass, a solid row of shrubs, and then a house. When the foundation is high, however, it is better to screen it entirely.

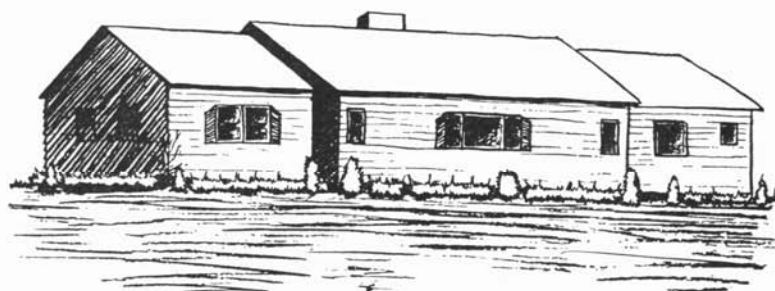


Figure 17

### Choose Your Plants With Care

In *Figure 17* we see a typical newly planted home. Basically the planting is not undesirable—it is low and there is some variation in height. All in all, the house—not the plants—is still the dominant feature.

But what often happens to such a planting is shown in *Figure 18*. The plants have grown so high that they overpower the house. So unless you are prepared to do a lot of pruning, remember not to select plants that will grow taller than you want.

Not only the ultimate height, but also shape, growth habit, and ornamental effects should be considered in making selections. It is essential, too, that the plants be adapted to the conditions in which they are to grow—whether in sun or shade, for example, or wet or dry soil.

A few of the many plants suitable for foundation plantings in Illinois are described briefly on the following pages. Further information may be obtained from a variety of sources—among them nurserymen, nursery catalogs, and Illinois Circular 715, "Trees, Shrubs, and Woody Vines for the Home Grounds."



Figure 18

## SOME EVERGREENS TO CHOOSE FROM

**Juniper.** Good evergreens for sunny areas only, junipers will grow in dry soil and can be pruned. Most are susceptible to red spider and bagworm attack.

Possibly the best for use around a low home is the Andorra Juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis plumosa*). Its height of 1½ feet and spread of 4 feet give it much versatility. It can be used as an informal hedge or as an interest plant. One Andorra Juniper in front of a deciduous shrub gives winter color and helps extend the planting from the house.

The Pfitzer Juniper (*Juniperus chinensis pfitzeriana*) attains a height of about 5 feet and a spread of 8 feet. It is excellent where large amounts of mass are needed. Its horizontal branching habit adapts it to use around a low house.

The Hill Juniper (*Juniperus virginiana pyramidiformis*) with its purple foliage in the fall, offers possibilities as an accent plant. It can be pruned to 6 or 8 feet.

**Pine.** The one pine of merit for low plantings is the Dwarf Mountain Pine (*Pinus montana mughus*), a rounded, compact plant that attains a height of 4 feet. It is desirable for planting next to an entrance where a vertical accent is not desired.

**Redcedar.** The Canaert Redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana canaerti*) and Keteleer Redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana keteleeri*) are good accent plants. They can be pruned to 6 or 8 feet. Canaert Redcedar has horizontal branches and produces blue berries in the fall.

**Yew.** The aristocrat of the evergreens, the yew will grow in sun or shade in the average Illinois soil. Plants are not seriously affected by insects or diseases and can be pruned into any size or shape desired. The pistillate flowering forms of the yew produce red berries in the fall.

The Dwarf Japanese Yew (*Taxus cuspidata nana*) makes an ideal dwarf hedge which can be sheared into a formal shape or allowed to grow informally. It also serves as a foreground for deciduous shrubs. A slow grower, it generally attains a height of 3 feet and a spread of approximately 4 feet.

For accents, the vase-shaped Hicks Yew (*Taxus media hicksi*) or the pyramidal Upright Japanese Yew (*Taxus cuspidata capitata*) may be used. Both can be kept at 6 feet by pruning. (See Illinois Circular 708.)

The Spreading Japanese Yew (*Taxus cuspidata*) is ideal for softening corners, especially around tall houses where large amounts of mass are needed.

All the above-mentioned yews make good hedges. The Hatfield (*Taxus media hatfieldi*) and Browns (*Taxus media browni*) are also good. The hedges may be kept at a height of 2½ feet.

## DECIDUOUS SHRUBS

**Barberry.** The Japanese (*Berberis thunbergi*) and Mentor (*Berberis mentorensis*) make good hedge plants. Both will grow in moist or dry soil and in sun or shade. The foliage on the Mentor stays green

quite late in fall, and the Japanese produces red berries in the fall. When allowed to grow unpruned, the Japanese barberry attains a height of 4 feet and the Mentor a height up to 10 feet.

**Cotoneaster.** For an interest or specimen plant, the Spreading Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster divaricata*) is very good. Attractive foliage throughout the summer and red fruit in the fall add much to the home setting.

**Currant.** The Alpine Currant (*Ribes alpinum*) is good for moist or dry soil, sun or shade. It makes an ideal hedge 2 to 3 feet high, which needs pruning only once a year.

**Deutzia.** A low shrub 2 to 3 feet high, the Slender Deutzia (*Deutzia gracilis*) can be used as an informal hedge or for a low planting in front of a house with vertical siding. It is desirable not only because of its low height but also because of its white flowers in midspring.

**Dogwood.** Winter interest need not be monopolized by evergreens. Yellowtwig Redosier Dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera flaviramea*) will add an attractive touch of yellow in the winter. It attains a height of 4 to 6 feet, has white flowers in mid-spring and white fruit in summer, and blends well with evergreens. It prefers a moist soil.

**Euonymus.** The Winged (*Euonymus alatus*) and Dwarf Winged Euonymus (*Euonymus alatus compactus*) are valuable for their foliage both in summer and fall (when the leaves turn red), and for the effect of their twigs in winter. Their angular stems and their branching habit make them ideal for blending with evergreens. Both plants have a spreading habit. The Winged Euonymus attains a height of 8 to 10 feet; the Dwarf Winged Euonymus has a maximum height of 3 to 5 feet and requires little pruning as a hedge.

The Brook Euonymus (*Euonymus americanus*) is desirable where an upright shrub which does not spread too wide is needed. It attains a height of 3 to 6 feet depending on soil and moisture conditions, and has red fruit in the fall.

**Floweringquince.** Both the Alpine Japanese Floweringquince (*Chaenomeles japonica alpina*) and the Dwarf Common Floweringquince (*Chaenomeles lagenaria pygmaea*) have red flowers in mid-spring and yellow fruit in the fall. These ornamental characteristics, as well as the low height of the plants (less than 3 feet), make them valuable for use around a low house.

**Forsythia.** The Early Forsythia (*Forsythia ovata*), with its yellow flowers in early spring, makes a good spreading interest plant 3 to 6 feet high.

**Hydrangea.** A good shrub for shade only is the Snowhill Hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens grandiflora*). It attains a height of 3 to 5 feet and has large white flowers in early summer.

**Privet.** The horizontal lines of Regels Border Privet (*Ligustrum obtusifolium regelianum*) and its height of 3 to 6 feet make it worthy of consideration for use around a low house. Also its summer foliage and winter branch effect help it blend with evergreens. If a tall spreading plant is wanted, the Amur Privet (*Ligustrum amurense*) will fill the need.

Both privets have white flowers in late spring, will grow in sun or shade, as well as in moist or dry soil, and make good formal sheared hedges.

**Snowball.** The Japanese Snowball (*Viburnum tomentosum sterile*) with its large white flowers and horizontal branches offers interest and repetition of horizontal house lines. It is suitable for use at a corner of a low home. Height is 8 to 15 feet.

**Spiraea.** Garland Spiraea (*Spiraea arguta*) has white flowers in mid-spring; Anthony Waterer (*Spiraea bumalda Anthony Waterer*) has pink flowers from late spring through fall. Average height of both is 3 feet. These plants do not like very much shade. The Anthony Waterer Spiraea makes a good informal hedge.

**Viburnum.** Koreanspice Viburnum (*Viburnum carlesi*) has pinkish white flowers in mid-spring, which are quite fragrant. The plant has a spreading habit, with an average height of 4 to 6 feet, and grows in the shade. It blends well with evergreens.

## VINES

**Clematis.** The Jackman (*Clematis jackmani*) with its purple flowers in early summer, and Henry Clematis (*Clematis lawsoniana henryi*) with its white flowers in summer, are two of the many desirable clematises. They will grow in shade or sun.

**Creeper.** The five-leafed Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) will grow in dry soil. It has blue fruit in the fall.

**Ivy.** Boston Ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*) is still desirable where a vigorous fast grower is preferred. It will grow in moist or dry soil. It has blue fruit in the fall.

**Roses.** Ramblers provide various flower colors in June.

**Wistaria.** With some training the Chinese Wistaria (*Wistaria sinensis*) will grow vertically. The violet-blue flowers in late spring are quite effective.