



# Foundation Plants

Almost every home needs foundation plants in order to keep the foundation from having a bare, hard look. Height is an issue since you don't usually want to block windows with plants that have gotten too tall. **Tips:** *Two common mistakes to avoid are planting too close to the house and planting too close to other plants.* This will aid proper plant development as well as access to the side of the house should it be necessary, as with painting or pressure washing. Try to also avoid planting directly under the roof's dripline if you have no gutters, or inefficient ones, since excess rainfall from this area will batter your plants. *In general, the mature foundation plant should be one-third to one-half the height from the ground to the bottom of the roof,* though corner plantings may be somewhat taller. All that said, here is a list of lean, green machines that are heat tolerant, cold hardy, and low maintenance with at least one key ornamental feature that makes them stand out. Most of them are evergreen, as well. These are proven performers that get the job done. **All, except those noted, are deer resistant.**

## **Low to Medium shrubs:**

**Abelia, Dwarf forms** – Almond-shaped foliage, often fantastically variegated, on arching branches or loosely rounded mounds. Tubular white, occasionally pink, flowers all summer followed by rosy-pink calyces that look like little flower clusters. Mostly evergreen. Dwarf varieties such as 'Little Richard' and 'Mardi Gras' grow 3-4 feet tall and wide. Full to part sun.

**Azaleas, especially reblooming varieties such as Encore, Bloom-A-Thon, and ReBLOOM** : Azaleas, the classic Southern plant, now come in many varieties that bloom at least twice a year. Most grow 3-4 feet or 4-5 feet tall and wide. Regular water during dry spells insures maximum bloom. Part sun to light shade. Not deer resistant.

**Aucuba** - Evergreen shrubs for shade with large, lustrous green leaves in solid green and variegated forms. Dwarf varieties generally reach 4-5 tall and somewhat wider. Grow in shade to morning sun.

**Camellias, Dwarf** - Dwarf forms such as 'Jean May', 'Bonanza', 'Shishigashira', and 'Hot Flash' generally grow to 5-6' tall and wide, sometimes 4-5'. Camellias prefer morning sun and afternoon shade or light shade all day. Water regularly the first 2-3 years. Drought tolerant once established. Not deer resistant.

**Fringe Bush/Loropetalum** – Most varieties feature wine-purple foliage, and bright fuchsia pink fringe-like flowers in spring that resemble shredded coconut (Alternatively, olive-green foliage and white flowers). Unpruned, they have an arching tiered habit but they can also be sheared into formal shapes. Dwarf varieties reach 4-6'tall. Foliage color is best when you fertilize regularly or else it goes dark olive green. Sun (for best foliage color) to light shade. Generally, deer resistant with occasional munching in winter.

**Gardenia** – Lovely, creamy white, coconut/vanilla/jasmine scented blooms in summer on handsome evergreen foliage. 'Frostproof' and 'Kleim's Hardy' are among the toughest. 'Jubilation' and 'Crown Jewel' will re-bloom (lightly). Dwarf varieties such as these generally grow to about 3 feet tall which is often the perfect size for a foundation shrub. Others can go up to 6 feet tall. 'Radicans' is a trailing variety that get about 1.5' tall and 4-5' wide. Sun to part sun.

**Globe Arborvitae** (*Thuja occidentalis* & *T. plicata* cvs. ie. 'Danica' 'Grune Kugel', 'Hetzi Midget', 'Mr. Bowling Ball') - Compact, densely-growing conifers with feathery, evergreen foliage. Generally, to 2-3 feet tall and wide. Sun to part sun. Occasionally severely damaged by deer but not first choice. In our area, deer seem to prefer varieties of *Thuja plicata*.

**'Golden Mop' Falsecypress** (*Chamaecyparis pis. fil.* 'Aurea') – This conifer adds grace and fine texture to the landscape with golden, pendulous, thread-leaf branchlets. 4-6' tall by 4-5' wide. Full to part sun. 'Vintage Gold' has feathery, almost fern-like gold foliage.

**'Goshiki' False Holly** (*Osmanthus heterophyllus* 'Goshiki') - Slow-growing evergreen shrub with holly-like leaves splashed with creamy white and flecked with green. Variegation is more pronounced on younger foliage. Eventually, gets to 5-6 tall and about 3-4' wide but don't hold your breath. Tough, easy-to-grow and a nice contrast plant in both texture and leaf color.

**Indian Hawthorn, Dwarf** – The shiny, compact foliage is handsome, turning a nice burgundy in winter, and the masses of pink or white flower clusters in spring are quite pretty. Full sun. Not deer resistant.

**Japanese Cedar, Dwarf forms** ('Nana Globosa', 'Elegans Nana') - Feathery plumes of light olive green foliage create pleasantly attractive texture and are a nice alternative to boxwood. Grow to 3-4' tall and wide. Sun to part sun.

**'Lake Treasca' Privet** – Arching sprays of bright, thick leaves on 'Lake Treasca' add a flowing effect suggestive of wind and water. Spikes of cream-white flowers in spring are a nice bonus. Grows to about 3-4' tall and wide and will do it in either sun or light shade. 'East Bay' is another good candidate growing slightly larger to 4-5' tall and wide.

**Nandina** – Super-tough, easy to grow, and evergreen. Two general groups: little low growers than turn red in winter sun but don't fruit and somewhat taller varieties (generally, 3-6') with more feathery foliage, burgundy new growth, clusters of small white spring flowers followed by bright red berry clusters. There are very dwarf varieties in this second group but they don't seem to produce

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very many berries. Sun or shade.

**Plum Yew, Dwarf** (*Cephalotaxus* spp.) - Feathery foliage reminiscent of conifer leaves usually bright medium to green to dark emerald black. Dwarf varieties usually have spreading, arching habits. Can be sheared to formal shapes. Shade to part sun. Note: plum yew/Japanese yew, CEPHALOTAXUS, are deer resistant but other yews, TAXUS, are not.

**'Soft Caress' Mahonia** (*Mahonia* 'Soft Caress') - Named 2013 Plant of the Year at the world-famous Chelsea Flower Show, this handsome evergreen features dark blue-green feathery foliage that resembles fern fronds and none of the thorn-like spines often associated with *Mahonia*. Bright yellow flower spikes top the plant in fall. Drought tolerant. Part to full shade. Grows 4' tall & wide.

## **Edging, Front of the Border:**

**Dwarf Boxwood** (Extra dwarf varieties i.e. 'Grace Hendrick Phillips', 'Morris Dwarf', 'Morris Midget', 'Green Pillow') - Handsome shrubs with finely-textured, olive-shaped leaves of light to dark green. Easy to shear into formal shapes and low hedges. Best in morning sun with afternoon shade. Grows 1-2' tall and wide depending on variety. Apply lime to soils around boxwood as needed to keep optimum pH of 6.5-7.2.

**Carex/Sedge Grass** (*Carex* spp.) - Evergreen, clumping grass for shade. Usually available in variegated forms such as 'Evergold' or bronze-leaf form. Grows to about 1-1.5 feet tall and wide.

**Germander** (*Teucrium chamaedrys*) - Small, flowering herb growing about 1 foot tall and wide. Small, lavender-pink flowers in early summer. Plant in full sun for best form as it gets floppy in part sun or shade.

**Monkey Grass/Lirope** (*Liriope muscari*) - Evergreen "grass" superb for edging borders since it is compact, slow to spread, easy to maintain, and only grows to about 8-10 inches tall. Make sure to get the clumping form listed here unless you want a spreading groundcover. Small, upright spikes of bright lavender or white flowers in summer. Available in dark emerald green or gold-and-green variegated form. Plant in part sun to light shade.

## **Upright Narrow (good for accents and at corners to frame lower plants)**

*These selections are compact with few, if any, pruning requirements when sited correctly.*

**Columnar Camellia** - Excellent flower show in fall on shrubs with a more narrow habit and handsome lustrous foliage that stays evergreen: 'Autumn Rocket' (white flowers), 'Slim 'n Trim' (pink). Generally, 8-10' tall and 4' wide. Morning sun to light shade.

**Dwarf Burford Holly** (*Ilex cornuta* 'Burfordii Nana') - Glossy, emerald green foliage crowned with scarlet berries in fall and winter. Easy to shear into formal shapes. Generally, grows to 6-8 feet tall and about 5 feet wide. Sun to light shade.

**'Emerald' Arborvitae** (*Thuja occidentalis* 'Smaragd') - Bright emerald green foliage that retains most of its greenness (unlike some other arborvitae) in winter. Drought tolerant. Grows to 12' tall and 4' wide. Full sun to part shade. Occasionally damaged by deer.

**'Sky Pencil' Holly** (*Ilex crenata* 'Sky Pencil') - When you need an extra-slender vertical accent, 'Sky Pencil' holly is your girl. Dark green foliage similar to boxwood in size & shape on a very narrow evergreen plant. Grows to 6-8' tall, 2 feet wide. Full to part sun.

**Upright Japanese Plum Yew** (*Cephalotaxus* h. 'Fastigiata') - A good selection for shady spots that need a vertical accent. Shiny, intensely dark green, needle-like foliage is borne on vertical stems. Slow-growing to 8-10' tall and about 4-6' wide.

**Columnar Juniper** (*Juniperus* spp. ie. 'Robusta', 'Spartan', 'Blue Arrow') - Narrow, evergreen conifers generally growing to 2-4' wide and 9-14' tall, depending on variety. Drought/heat/everything tolerant (except shade). Full sun.

## **Small Trees:**

**Camellia Patio Tree** (*C. japonica*, *C. sasanqua*) - Evergreen shrubs with big, stunning blooms in a variety of colors. Availability of those that come already trained into a tree is limited but they can be found. It's not hard, however, to train them up into a small patio tree that would average around 8-12' tall. Width varies depending on species used. Ideal light is morning sun with afternoon shade but many varieties, especially of the fall-blooming *Camellia sasanqua*, can acclimate to full sun. Not deer resistant.

**Crepe Myrtle Tree** (*Lagerstroemia* cvs.) - Though not evergreen, they provide a long season of colorful blooms in summer, fantastic fall color in many cases, and beautiful bark with handsome architecture in winter. Heat and drought tolerant, pest and disease resistant. When pruning, do not cut off main stems to tall stubs. Ask us how to prune properly if you have questions. Full blazing sun or at least 5 hours of afternoon sun.

**Fringe-bush Patio Tree** (*Loropetalum chinense* cvs.) - Taller varieties of fringe-bush can be trained up into small trees, and may sometimes be available already trained. Handsome, burgundy-colored foliage adds interest and contrast year-round (color is best when you fertilize regularly or else it goes dark olive green). Has a good show of bright raspberry-pink fringe-like flowers in spring and some again in fall. Good varieties for this include 'Daruma' (6-7' tall), 'Ruby' (6-9'), 'Pizazz' (6-8'), 'Zhouzhou Fuchsia' (6-9'), 'Burgundy' (13-15'). Full sun (best foliage color) to light shade. Sometimes browsed by deer in winter but not a first choice food.

**Japanese Maple** (*Acer palmatum* spp.) - Not evergreen but excellent spring and fall colors, as well as fascinating architecture and attractive, smooth bark make up for that especially when you put fairy lights on them in winter. Stunning palmate foliage, often dissected, and in accent colors such as burgundy, chartreuse, variegated, or peachy-copper is another great reason to grow them. Habit varies from upright to spreading/weeping. Morning sun with afternoon shade is ideal but will also grow in light, dappled shade. Full sun, in our area, results in foliage that looks like it's been burnt. Seldom severely damaged by deer.

**Privet/Ligustrum Patio Tree** (*Ligustrum* spp.) - A specially trained form of privet that has been pruned into a small, evergreen tree. Spikes of fragrant cream-colored flowers in late spring. Thick, lustrous broadleaf evergreen leaves provide year-round coverage. Grows to 8-10' tall and wide. Plant in sun to light shade.