

Go Native!

Gardening with native plants on Lake George

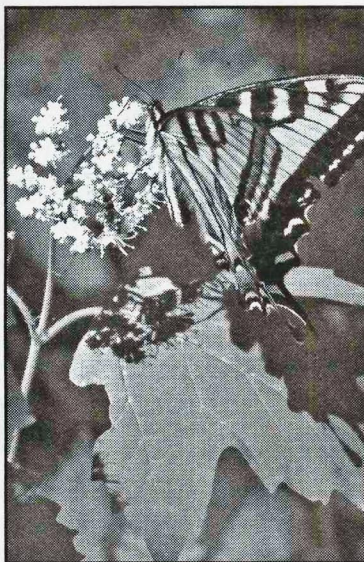
BY EMILY DEBOLT

March's Plant of the Month *Mapleleaf Viburnum.* *Viburnum acerifolium*

In honor of maple sugaring season, I have selected mapleleaf viburnum as this month's native plant. Since I don't grow trees at the nursery, this is the closest plant that I have to a real maple!

Mapleleaf viburnum is one of our many native viburnums, which are well-known for being adaptable and fast growing shrubs, at home in the garden landscape as well as in nature. American Highbush cranberry and Arrowwood are two other native viburnums that are more commonly used in landscaping that you might have heard of.

Mapleleaf viburnum is a smaller, lesser-known species, found in forest understories across much of the Northeast. It is slower growing and lankier than its well known relatives. However, its ability to thrive in dry shade makes it a valuable plant for gardening if you have such conditions. It can also tolerate acidic soils and steep slopes. Hardy to zone 3, mapleleaf viburnum can grow in both moist and dry soils and in sun to shade. However it thrives best in the cooler shade, especially if the soil is dry. Wood



aster and blue-stemmed goldenrod are good companion perennials that also flourish in dry shade.

Mapleleaf viburnum has creamy white flowers that stand up in flat-topped clusters in late spring. The berries are clusters of oval, flattened fruits that turn a deep blue-black in the fall and look striking against the purple and deep burgundy colored large maple-shaped leaves. The leaves have 3 lobes, just like a maple, and are arranged oppositely in pairs along the stem. Eventually growing around 4 ft in height at maturity and the same in width, mapleleaf viburnum is a bit twiggy looking, so don't plant it if you are looking for a big showy specimen plant. However, with its white flowers, dark berries, and gorgeous fall foliage, this native

shrub provides lots of interest, so don't pass it by too quickly.

Mapleleaf viburnum provides food and shelter for many birds. Its low branches provide nesting habitat for the Northern Cardinal, Gray Catbird and other. The berries have a relatively high sugar content, which makes them winter persistent, so they are a very important food source for a wide variety of birds in the winter. Plant native viburnums in your yard with other shrubs such as dogwoods, which have berries higher in fat content. These berries aren't winter persistent, but are important as a food source for migrating birds in the fall. By planting both types of shrubs, you can provide food for the migrating birds in the fall and the year-round residents in the winter, increasing the variety of colorful feathered friends that visit your backyard.

Viburnums aren't just for the birds. They also provide nectar for butterflies and bees. On a hike during the first week of June last year, I saw this tiger swallowtail butterfly sipping nectar from a flowering mapleleaf viburnum right along the trail.

"Go Native" highlights a different native plant each month that can be used in the home garden and landscape. Written by Emily DeBolt, owner of Fiddlehead Creek Farm and Native Plant Nursery in Hartford, NY. For more info about gardening with native plants, Emily can be reached at Emily@fiddleheadcreek.com.