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2 worthy Viburnums primed for selection

For the past four years, Bonnie and I terminated the southern summer with a vacation in Maine. These vacations have become synonymous with hiking the wilds, plant hunting, photography, spiritual renewal and blueberry cream pie. A particular field of lowbush blueberry, *Vaccinium angustifolium*, on Route 15 is initiating fall color and the first indicator that the week will be rewarding, rain or shine.

We always hike Cadillac Mountain, Acadia National Park, and it is there that *Viburnum cassinoides*, withe-rod viburnum, with its rich pink to blackish fruits and rose to red-purple fall color, beckons the passerby to appreciate and savor the beauty. My many photographs attest to the aesthetics of this seldom-cultivated shrub. I question why no one (Is there someone?) has exploited the variation in habit, foliage, fruit and fall color for the betterment of American gardens. 'Nanum' is described in British literature but I have yet to observe this clone.

In my hikes through the southern Appalachians in Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia, the plant is common at higher elevations and into the piedmont. I have seen plants from 1,200- to 6,000-foot elevations. Most are rather loose shrubs in the understory, but when open grown are more dense and approximate 8-12 feet (sometimes to 15 feet) high and wide and produce creamy-white flowers in 2- to 5-inch-diameter, flat-topped cymes. In 1997, on May 24 plants along Panther Creek in North Georgia were in full flower. The species on Bunches Bald (6,000 feet) along the Blue Ridge Parkway was in full flower on

Above: Most Viburnum cassinoides are loose shrubs in the understory, but when grown in the open are more dense, reaching 8-12 feet high and wide and producing creamy-white flowers.

*V. cassinoides* has larger flowers and lustrous, rich-green leaves, while fall color is vivid red-purple (inset).
in fall. New emerging leaves are bronze to purple tinted.

Buds are valvate, dusty brown to gray-brown, ½ inch or longer and remind me of an elongated pencil point; flower buds are smaller (occur at terminal of stem) with a bulbous (swollen) base. When new leaves emerge, the two scales become reflexed. On close inspection, the bud and leaf development are intriguing.

Firm-wooded (June) cuttings are rooted with 5,000 parts per million potassium indolebutyric acid. We have been quite successful with the species.

I believe there is terrific room for selection and know the species is genetically diverse to allow for superior selections. Adaptability easily umbrellas Zones 4-8.

A related species — *V. nudo*  
A related species, *Viburnum nudum*, smooth witeh-roed, occurs from Connecticut to Florida, west to Kentucky and Texas. Although considered less hardy than *V. cassinoides*, it is a delightful addition to the landscape.

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Noïdes it has been growing at the Morton Arboretum (Zones 4-5) since 1954. Viburnum nudum was merged with V. noïdes, but appears to be a legitimate taxonomic entity, i.e., species. Two of the modern taxonomic references treat the two species as separate entities; J.T. Kartesz and K. Kartesz ("Synonymized Checklist of the Vascular Flora of North America") reduce V. noïdes to a variety of V. nudum.

The differences between the two as I view them include larger, more lustrous, elliptical-oval leaves, entire (usually) or finely toothed, vivid red-purple fall color and blue fruits on V. nudum. From a garden perspective, V. nudum is more appealing.

‘Winterthur’ is a lovely, glossy, rich green-leaf form that holds up well in the heat. Another form in our garden came from the now-defunct Earthshade Nursery in Warre, N.C. It appears more vigorous than ‘Winterthur’ and possesses larger flowers and leaves (lustrous, rich green).

A check of herbarium specimens reflected the plant's moist to wet soil affinity and coastal plain habitat. A moist area below a spring, peat bog, damp area, tidal swamp, muck soil, flood plain forest and swamp were listed as habitats. Sizes ranged from 5-12 feet high. The fruits, even on 30- to 50-year-old herbarium specimens, retained the bloomy, rich-blue coloration. Fruit ripening occurred from July to October depending on location of collected specimens. Interestingly, I noted that some specimens collected in spring still held their colorful fruits.

After assessing the diversity of leaf types, fruits and infrutescence sizes, I am primed to roam the Georgia Coastal Plain habitat and select for garden traits. The fact that V. nudum is wet-soil tolerant bodes well for producers and end users.

The variation in these two species provides incentive for selection and evaluation. Sixteen years ago, there were no named forms of Itea virginica, sweetspire. At present I know of at least six. Similar possibilities exist for V. noïdes and V. nudum.