**Hamamelis vernalis** - Vernal Witchhazel *(Hamamelidaceae)*

*Hamamelis vernalis* is known as a very early and fragrant-flowering shrub. Vernal Witchhazel has a rounded to spreading growth habit at maturity, and is adaptable to a wide range of soil, sunlight, and moisture conditions. It is used here to represent a group of early-flowering, fragrant and showy shrubs.

### FEATURES

#### Form
- medium-sized (to large-sized)
- ornamental shrub
- maturing at about 8' tall x 8' wide
- under typical urban conditions, but sometimes much larger
- upright vased growth habit in youth, quickly becoming rounded and spreading with age
- slow growth rate

#### Culture
- full sun to partial shade
- performs best in full sun in moist soils that are loamy or sandy, but is very tolerant of rocky to gravelly soils, poor soils, clay soils, wet or dry soils, and soils of various pH
- no significant disease problems, an occasional leaf gall being the only cosmetic pest problem
- commonly available in B&B or container form
- roots that are close to the multi-stemmed shrub will often sucker with maturity, forming tight colonies (unless they are pruned away)
- dead foliage is often persistent on all but the first-year wood, and if maximum floral effect is to be achieved, they must be hand-picked by the time that flowers emerge in winter

#### Foliage
- medium green to dark green, alternate, distinctly obovate, rather thick, and about 4" long, having deeply crenate margins, impressed veins, a cuneate asymmetrical base, and a short petiole
- autumn color is yellowish green in many years but golden-yellow in good years

#### Flowers
- variable from bright yellow to dull orange to red-orange for the species form, extremely fragrant
- the flowers are in tight clusters on the short lateral stems, usually opening during the few warm days of Jan. or Feb. and persisting into Mar. or early Apr.
- flowers are small (about 0.5" long), with 4 narrow petals

#### Fruits
- 2-valved capsule is a drab yellowish green-olive color in late summer, eventually splitting open and flaring at its ends; not ornamentally significant, but a good identification feature that is persistent into the following season

#### Twigs
- densely pubescent when young, becoming smooth during the second year, transitioning from tan to gray, with distinctive knobby floral buds on the old and small, linear, naked vegetative buds (without scales) on the terminal growth

#### Trunk
- not applicable

### USAGE

#### Function
- shrub utilized as a specimen, in a group planting at the border, naturalized along streambanks or wetlands, planted for erosion control at wet or dry sites, or as a non-thorny informal barrier hedge

#### Texture
- medium-thick in foliage and when semi-bare
- thick density in foliage and when truly bare

#### Assets
- extremely fragrant flowers in winter or very early spring (this genus represents the first group of woody plants to flower)
- equally tolerant of wet or dry sites, sunny or shady sites, and gravelly or clay soils (excellent choice for naturalized areas, erosion sites, or neglected areas)

#### Liabilities
- dead foliage often persists and partially hides the miniature flowers
- autumn color is often poor
- suckering and forming a tight colony with age (can be an asset for erosion control or naturalized areas)

#### Habitat
- Zones 3 to 8
- Native to regions of the Southern U.S. to the Great Plains

### SELECTIONS

#### Alternates
- shrubs with fragrant blossoms (species and hybrids of *Clethra, Itea, Philadelphus, Syringa*, some *Viburnum*, etc.)
- shrubs that bloom in late winter or early spring (*Corylus avellana* 'Contorta', *Viburnum farreri*, *Pieris japonica*, *Salix discolor*, etc.)

#### Cultivars - Variants - Related species
- *Hamamelis x intermedia* - hybrids of *H. japonica* and *H. mollis* constitute some of the best early-blooming Witchhazels in commerce today:
  - 'Arnold Promise' - sulfur-yellow flowers are strongly and pungently fragrant, growth habit remains vased longer than most Witchhazels, and autumn color is an outstanding mixture of green, yellow, orange, and red
  - 'Diane' - flowers are coppery-red to bronzed-red and mildly fragrant, but dead foliage is somewhat persistent in winter
  - 'Jelena' (also known as 'Copper Beauty') - flowers are a glowing copper-color from a distance, but are actually red at the base, orange in the center, and yellow at the tip of the petals; also having red-orange autumn leaves that abscise well
- *Hamamelis virginiana* – another native U.S. species; flowers yellow, 1.5" in diameter, bloom in late autumn about the time leaves drop. Does well in woods, shade, poor conditions