Kerria japonica - Japanese Kerria (Rosaceae)

*Kerria japonica* is an upright to arching, green-stemmed shrub with golden-yellow late spring and sporadic summer flowers.

**FEATURES**

**Form**
- small ornamental shrub
- maturing at up to 5’ tall x 6’ wide
- arching clump growth habit, becoming rounded with age
- rapid growth rate from its basal shoots, but slow growth rate from the established stems

**Culture**
- full sun to full shade
- prefers a moist, rich, well-drained, slightly acidic soil in partial sun, but will tolerate poor soils, various soil pHs, heat, drought, and various sun or shade conditions
- propagated primarily by rooted stem cuttings, but also by separation of the rooted suckers
- Rose Family, with few disease or pest problems, although death of the older, usually central stems in the winter is fairly common with mature shrubs
- moderately available in container form
- tolerant of heavy pruning, which can be used to rejuvenate old plants

**Foliage**
- emerging as a bright medium-green color and changing to dark green as the season progresses
- deciduous, alternate, ovate to lanceolate, doubly serrated, with impressed veins and an acuminate apex
- green to yellowish green autumn color that is persistent into Nov.

**Flowers**
- bright golden-yellow, in Apr. and May and sporadically throughout the summer
- 1.5" diameter
- solitary flowers can be very dense on the stems if sited in full sun
- each golden-yellow flower is effective for 2-3 weeks and has a good contrast against the green foliage background

**Fruits**
- small, brown, and ornamentally inconspicuous

**Twigs**
- bright kelly green, even in winter
- stems are very thin, somewhat zigzag, and have small brown conical winter buds
- dead stems are white-brown, noticeable, and often in the center of mature shrubs, and should be annually removed every late winter or early spring

**Trunk**
- not applicable

**USAGE**

**Function**
- foundation, specimen, group planting, or mass planting shrub, good for naturalizing in the border or in erosion control situations
- good winter stem contrast against red brick or white stone walls

**Texture**
- medium-fine texture in foliage and very fine-texture when bare
- open to average density in foliage but thick density when bare (for mature plants)

**Assets**
- evergreen (light green) stems on a deciduous shrub
- showy yellow flowers in late spring and sporadically thereafter
- rapid growth and vigor once established

**Liabilities**
- spreads underground beyond its original space and is invasive by peripheral suckers, except in a root-restricted site (such as in a raised bed, or between a sidewalk and a foundation)
- central stems on mature plants often dieback during winter (especially when sited in poorly drained soils) and turn off-white, and result in necessary maintenance for their selective removal in early spring

**Habitat**
- Zones 4 to 9
- Native to China

**SELECTIONS**

**Alternates**
- shrubs with winter stem appeal (*Acer palmatum* ‘Sango Kaku’, *Chionanthus retusus*, *Cornus sericea* cultivars, *Corylus avellana* ‘Contorta’, etc.)
- shrubs with showy yellow flowers in spring (*Cornus mas*, *Forsythia*, *Hamamelis x intermedia* ‘Arnold Promise’, etc.)
- naturalizing shrubs that can be used in the border or for erosion control (*Acanthopanax sieboldianus*, *Cornus alba*, *Salix purpurea*, *Sambucus canadensis*)

**Cultivars - Variants - Related species**
- *K. japonica* ‘Picta’ - gray-green leaves are irregularly variegated white on the extreme outer margins; a very good variegated shrub for partially shaded to fully shaded sites, but of low availability
- *K. japonica* ‘Pleniflora’ (right) - has double-flowering, golden-yellow flowers that resemble miniature button mums