

# Cotswold Cottage Gardening

## Elders and Bitters

Shrubs are the indispensable backbone of the garden, slower to establish than perennials, but eventually offering a presence and continuity, which no garden can be without. Here are some which I would always try to plant.



the leaves is so subtle: grey, green, almost pink in some lights, a unique and fascinating partner in a mixed border.

*Eleagnus angustifolia* has some of the most silvery leaves of any shrub, and is a very good ground filler. It takes a couple of years to get going, but then produces a great thicket of whippy bronze stems covered in silver leaves like minnows in a stream. It has inconspicuous flowers in summer, which nevertheless waft out the most delicious scent.

### The Butterfly Bush

I'm very fond of buddlejias, even the rather coarse wildings that seed themselves on railway embankments and into paving cracks, although the named types are generally more exciting in flower colour. *B. davidii* 'Black Knight' is the most striking, the darkest of purples, laden with flowers (and butterflies). 'Lochinch' has much paler, mauve flowers, lifted by a little red dot for contrast, but also rather better foliage, silvery grey and slightly more narrow than the usual coarse buddleja leaf, giving the whole plant an ethereal quality. *Globosa* looks quite like *davidii* in leaf, but bursts into burnt orange round flowers, and makes a more character bush (or small tree). Similar but even better is *x weyeriana* 'Golden Glow', the whole bush seeming to be suffused with tangerine light.

*Cotinus coggygria* are another set of plants which I love, although they come into leaf very late, almost persuading you that the winter has got the better of them. The 'purple' leaved ones, of which there are several rather similar cultivars, are dramatic in summer and autumn leaf; but ultimately I prefer the original species, partly because the flowers - the smoking clouds - are larger and more prolifically produced, and also because the colour of

### My Favourite Elder

I have a very soft spot for elders, although they don't care for my new clay soil as much as the Cotswold gravel of our last garden. There they were the most vigorous and reliable growers, putting on ten feet in a season, and weighed down with flowers and berries. I have enjoyed the golden-leaved elder, (though not the graceless cut-leaved 'Sutherland Gold') a white-variegated type and the newish pink-flowered 'Black Lace', but my favourite is still the old cultivar 'Guincho Purple.

*Photinia x fraseri* 'Red Robin' adds versatility to its obvious virtues of glossy evergreen leaves, vivid burgundy on emergence. This can be kept clipped as a hedge (although you obviously forfeit some of the dramatic young growth), grown on a single stem and topiarised, or let loose to become a really large and impressive shrub. What's more, it seems to be very robust, enjoying sun or shade, surviving drought or clay - a real star!

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