

Seeing its beauty come to the forefront while all other flowers are beginning to fade has prompted me to revisit it once again. A few years ago, I wrote about this particular flowering shrub. During the summer months, Rita and I frequently take an early evening ride about town to go for an ice cream treat and admire the beauty of the landscape. One particular evening we witnessed gorgeous flowering shrubs in other people's yards, but, sadly, not in ours. Today that situation has changed. Two of these wonderful shrubs are now blooming in our yard.

The shrub I am referring to is botanically known as *Hibiscus syriacus*. It is commonly called Rose-of-Sharon or Shrub Althea. The vast number of woody ornamental shrubs bloom in the



spring and/or early summer. This particular shrub blooms in late summer and into the fall when many other flowers are beginning to fade.



An erect, deciduous shrub,

Rose-of-Sharon produces colorful, cup-shaped flowers in summer and fall. It belongs to the mallow family and is related to the herbaceous hollyhock as well as other hibiscus. This shrub is hardy to Zone 5 and is capable of reaching heights of eight to ten feet. If pruned as a single stemmed plant, it can easily be grown as a small flowering tree. Rose-of-Sharon begins blooming



in late July and usually continues through September. It blooms on new wood. This flowering shrub is excellent for attracting hummingbirds. Depending on the cultivar, its two to five inch flowers are



either single or double in form. Flower colors include blue, pink, red, lavender, purple and white as well as bi-colors with contrasting centers. Interestingly, like other hibiscus, the flowers close at night.

Rose-of-Sharon performs best in full sun and in well-drained soils. It is extremely adaptable to various soils, soil pH, soil compaction, drought, and heavy pruning. Because of few disease or pest problems, this shrub makes an excellent choice for urban plantings. Since Rose-of-Sharon is hardy to Zone 5, spring planting is best. By planting in the spring, the shrub stands a better chance of becoming established before it faces its first winter. Even then, because of severe winter conditions, Rose-of-Sharon may still experience some winter kill.

The best time to prune Rose-of-Sharon is in the spring. This allows one to cut away any winterkill that may have occurred. Keep in mind, this shrub leafs out much later in the spring than other deciduous shrubs. I urge patience. Because of the late emerging leaves, one might easily assume the plant has died, but this is usually not the case.

Prune newly planted shrubs to shape in the first two years of growth, trimming lightly thereafter to maintain a compact form. If the plant needs a heavy pruning, the best time to do so is in late winter or early spring. By pruning away the majority of last season's growth, one will induce the plant to produce larger blossoms.

Many varieties of Rose-of-Sharon produce seedpods that shatter during the dormant season scattering seeds that easily germinate in the spring. To prevent this shrub from becoming invasive, snip off the seed capsules before they mature and open.

Rather than taking an evening ride to view other people's Rose-of-Sharon, we can now enjoy viewing our own. On second thought, if we avoid taking our usual evening ride, we will also miss out on our ice cream treat. Oh, Rita! Where are the car keys?