

Often this design takes the form of a border--useful in dividing or separating, and beautiful with tasteful combinations of textures, colors, and sizes. Start from the back, selecting the taller shrubs, so they don't overpower your garden when mature. Shrubs seven feet high are good for most borders. The plants will likely be much smaller when you buy them. The generous spaces between them may bother you for a year, but the shrubs fill in after that. Also, check their mature shapes. Arching shrubs, such as forsythia and spirea, for example, work well in informal hedges with plenty of space but can soon grow over a garden path.

Blooms vary, too. Some impatiently burst out before the leaves to give a solid pattern of undiluted color. Flowering cherries, redbud, many azaleas, and forsythia seem to be gigantic bouquets of pure fluff. Other shrubs clothe themselves with leaves before filling in with less conspicuous blooms.