

Plant Profiles: HORT 2242 Landscape Plants II

Botanical Name: *Hamamelis vernalis*

Common Name: vernal witchhazel, Ozark witch hazel

Family Name: Hamamelidaceae – witchhazel family

General Description: *Hamamelis vernalis* and *Hamamelis virginiana*, both native to eastern North America, are multi-stemmed large shrubs or small trees valued for their unique flowers and bloom time. The two species are primarily separated by habitat, flowering period, flower color and petal length, and the form or habit of the plant. *Hamamelis vernalis*, the spring blooming witchhazel, is a shrub. It is native to the Ozarks where it grows in gravelly beds and rocky banks of streams. *Hamamelis virginiana*, the fall-blooming witchhazel, is somewhat tree-form. Native in the Chicago area, it is a common plant of the high dune country, ravines, and rich moist woodlands. Cultivar selections of both species are available and are most often selected for improved flower qualities.

Zone: 4-8

Resources Consulted:

Bradford, Jack L., and Daniel L. Marsh. "Comparative Studies of the Witch Hazels *Hamamelis virginiana* and *Hamamelis vernalis*." *Arkansas Academy of Science Proceedings*. Vol. XXXI. (1977): 29-30. PDF file.

Dirr, Michael A. *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants: Their Identification, Ornamental Characteristics, Culture, Propagation and Uses*. Champaign: Stipes, 2009. Print.

"The PLANTS Database." *USDA, NRCS*. National Plant Data Team, Greensboro, NC 27401-4901 USA, 2014. Web. 17 Mar. 2014.

Creator: Julia Fitzpatrick-Cooper, Professor, College of DuPage

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Keywords/Tags: Hamamelidaceae, *Hamamelis vernalis*, vernal witchhazel, witch hazel, shrub, deciduous



Whole plant/Habit:

- Description: *Hamamelis vernalis* is a dense, rounded, multi-stemmed shrub.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: July 5, 2008
- Image File Name: vernal_witch_hazel_1918.png



Whole plant/Habit:

- Description: The lower branches flare out and up creating a rounded form.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: March 18, 2006
- Image File Name: vernal_witch_hazel_0341.png



Branch/Twig:

- Description: Young stems are pubescent while older stems are smooth and gray. They are very similar to *Hamamelis virginiana* stems. Notice the bee working the sweet-smelling flower. In early March, no less!
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: March 6, 2009
- Image File Name: vernal_witch_hazel_110608.png



Bud: Vegetative

- Description: *Hamamelis vernalis* has foliose vegetative buds. They are tomentose (hairy) and look like little tan leaves. They are very similar to the vegetative buds of *Hamamelis virginiana*.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: March 6, 2009
- Image File Name: vernal_witch_hazel_0269.png



Bud: Flower

- Description: Flower buds are round, bend down, and are produced on stalks in clusters of 3-4. They look like the flower buds of *Hamamelis virginiana*, however, *Hamamelis vernalis* blooms in late winter to early spring.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: November 27, 2009
- Image File Name: vernal_witch_hazel_1150890.png



Flower:

- Description: The flowers of *Hamamelis vernalis* bloom prior to the leaves emerging. Bloom time is generally January through March. The flowers have the ability to roll back up if the weather gets too cold and unfurl again when the weather is more favorable. This protective adaptation is present in both species of *Hamamelis*.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: March 6, 2009
- Image File Name: vernal_witch_hazel_0270.png



Flower:

- Description: The fragrant flowers have four strap-like petals. Typically yellow with a reddish calyx, they can vary in color from yellow to orange to red.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: February 5, 2012
- Image File Name: vernal_witch_hazel_1340768.png



Flower:

- Description: In addition to bloom time, flower color and petal length help separate the two species. The petals of *Hamamelis virginiana* (left) are two to three times longer than *Hamamelis vernalis* and are more lemon yellow with very little, if any, infusion of red in the petals. The shorter petals of *Hamamelis vernalis* (right) will vary from yellow to orange to red. While both species are fragrant, *Hamamelis vernalis* is considered to be more intensely fragrant.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: 2012
- Image File Name: common_witch_hazel_7432s.png



Fruit:

- Description: The immature capsules begin to form as the flowers fade.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: July 5, 2008
- Image File Name: vernal_witch_hazel_1915.png



Fruit:

- Description: The capsules mature in autumn of their first year and catapult the seeds up to 30 feet away! Some of the open capsules may persist on the stem for an extended period of time.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: January 16, 2008
- Image File Name: vernal_witch_hazel_0052.png



Leaf:

- Description: The leaves are alternate, simple, and dark green during the growing season. The leaf differs from *Hamamelis virginiana* in that they are cuneate (wedge-shaped) at the base, have 4-6 vein pairs and have a thicker substance to the leaf. Differentiating between the two species by leaf can be challenging as the differences are subtle.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: July 5, 2008
- Image File Name: vernal_witch_hazel_1917.png



Winter interest:

- Description: It is common for *Hamamelis vernalis* to retain some (sometimes many) of its leaves throughout the winter. The dried, brown leaves add texture and character to the shrub during winter; however, the old leaves often obscure the delicate late winter to early spring flowers. Some gardeners have been known to go out and pick all the dead leaves off the plant to avoid this! *Hamamelis virginiana* may also retain leaves but it is more prevalent with the spring-blooming species.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: January 16, 2008
- Image File Name: vernal_witch_hazel_0059.png



Special ID feature(s):

- Description: The shrub-form habit and late winter to early spring bloom time will help identify *Hamamelis vernalis*.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: March 18, 2006
- Image File Name: vernal_witch_hazel_0325.png