



Tony Glover  
Regional Extension Agent  
News Release

## Screen Plants

Question: Can you suggest a good screen plant that will deter people from easily accessing my back yard? I do not want a fence but would like a little added security.

Answer: The plant that pops up in my mind is a pyracantha. Winter is often when I think of this plant because it has showy fruit until the cedar wax wings and other birds clean them off. Pyracantha is a member of the rose family and, like its cousin, has an abundance of thorns. The thorns are much larger and more painful to encounter than roses. My dad always said nothing will keep determined intruders out, but pain will do a good job deterring 'honest' folks.

Although pyracantha can be maintained as a four or five foot shrub, it would be better if you did not have to prune it very often due to the aforementioned pain. The ultimate size of most varieties will be about 10' by 10', so it does not take many plants to make a living fence. The plants can be planted somewhat closer for quicker fill but remember to allow plenty of depth for them to spread. They are fast growers that are adapted to many soil types, except poorly drained soil.

Winter is a great time to plant them. Dig the plant hole as wide as practical but at least twice as wide as the root ball. To avoid plant settling to a position deeper than desired, do not dig any deeper than the root ball. I always like to pull the plant from the container and wash off most of the bark from around the roots. This will allow you to spread the roots out laterally in the wide planting hole and will prevent air pockets which would develop when the bark slowly decays after planting.

The first year after planting pyracantha will need supplemental watering to get them well established, but once established they are pretty tough plants. Keep the area around the plants weed free and do not use weed eaters around the base. Three inches of mulch over the root system can go a long way in helping control weeds and retain moisture. Do not pile mulch thickly around the base of the plants.

Although pyracantha is not a native plant it is widely adapted and the native birds and wildlife do love the fruit they produce. Pyracantha can also be used in floral arrangements to add a splash of color and a distinct texture. Most varieties have bright red berries but there are some yellow and

orange fruited varieties available. If the standard sized plant is too big for the area you have in mind there is a compact selection called Red Elf. This might be a good choice for underneath a window to deter an intruder or peeping Tom.

Two serious problems on pyracantha are fire blight, a bacterial disease that can kill the plant, and scab, a fungal disease which causes defoliation and turns fruit a dark, sooty color. To minimize problems, choose disease-resistant selections such as 'Apache,' 'Fiery Cascade,' 'Mohave,' 'Navaho,' 'Pueblo,' 'Rutgers,' 'Shawnee' and 'Teton.' For further information on growing this useful and beautiful plant visit: <http://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheets/HGIC1072.htm>.

For more about this topic please contact Tony Glover, Regional Extension Agent-Home Horticulture, Home Gardens and Home Pest Management at the St. Clair County Extension Office at (205) 338-9416 or email [gloveta@auburn.edu](mailto:gloveta@auburn.edu).

*Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work in agriculture and home economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, and other related acts, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M University and Auburn University) offers educational programs, materials, and equal opportunity employment to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, veteran status, or disability. Visit our website at [www.aces.edu/StClair](http://www.aces.edu/StClair).*