

## *Viburnum obovatum* ‘Walter’

**Family:** *Caprifoliaceae*

Walter’s viburnum; black haw; small-leaf viburnum



An example of a tall variety. Lakes Park, South Fort Myers

### **Walter’s Viburnum**

**Synonyms (Discarded Names):** *Viburnum nashii*

**Origin:** Florida; Southeastern U.S.

**U.S.D.A. Zone:** 7a-10b (Minimum 0°F)

**Growth Rate:** Medium

**Flowering Months:** Spring, for 2-3 weeks

**Leaf Persistence:** Semi-evergreen to evergreen in mild winters

**Light requirement:** Medium to high

**Salt Tolerance:** Low

**Drought Tolerance:** Moderate

**Soil:** Acid to alkaline; well-drained to occasionally wet

**Nutritional Requirements:** Low

**Potential Pests:** *Rhizoctonia solani* (root rot) under certain conditions

**Typical Dimensions:** 6 to 15 feet by 6-8 feet

**Propagation:** Cuttings; seeds

**Human hazards:** None known

**Uses:** Small tree; foundation; hedge; massing shrub; roadway; screen; specimen; wildlife attractant



The plant can be completely covered in flowers when in full bloom.



Dense foliage arrangement.

### Natural Geographic Distribution

In Florida, Walter's viburnum has a native range from Walton County in the panhandle to Monroe County in the south. It commonly grows in hammocks, thickets and swamp margins from Florida and along the coast to South Carolina, west to Alabama. It is found in areas of shallow to moderate annual inundations in fertile sandy soil.

### Growth Habit and Cultivars

Walter's viburnum can grow as a shrub or a small understory tree to 26 feet tall. It has various stiff and short branches. However, there are various forms and cultivars growing either upright, spreading or compact, and having considerable shorter heights. They are typically multi-trunked or clumping and can form colonies of plants. In South Florida, Walter's viburnum may be either evergreen or semi-deciduous in mid-winter. All Walter's viburnum have a smooth bark that may be slightly plated on older trunks. The twigs and stems are gray or silver in color.

Several compact cultivars are available. They have a denser growth habit and stay shorter, usually around 4 to 6 feet. These can be used as a formal hedge or topiary. *V. obovatum* 'Mrs. Schiller's Delight' is a dwarf cultivar that grows to 2-4 feet with a similar spread. The dwarf *V. obovatum* 'Densa' grows to 5 –6 feet; 'Rieflers Densa' is similar in size to 'Densa' but more adapted to wet locations. Walter's viburnum 'Withlacoochee' has an open, but uniform growth pattern, growing to a maximum height of 14 feet; however it can be kept trimmed as a 6-7 foot hedge. It has good drought tolerance but may suffer occasional dieback in extreme drought. *Viburnum obovatum* 'Whorled class' is so called because it has 3 leaves growing per node, giving it a whorled appearance. The foliage turns bronze in the autumn. It is a very slow grower and can be difficult to find in the nurseries. 'Select' has a more upright habit than many of the other dwarf cultivars. They all can be easily confused in the nursery so check identification labels.



February 16, Alva, Lee County



Reddish bark of Walter's viburnum

### Leaf, Flower, Fruit and Reproduction

The glossy, leathery, dark green leaves of *Viburnum obovatum* are opposite, small, from 1-2 inches long with short petiole, essentially sessile on the stem. The blade is narrowly to broadly obovate, and the margins entire or finely toothed. The leaves are fragrant when crushed. Flower buds are two-scaled, brown and very small. The inflorescence is a terminal convex cyme. Individual flowers are small, bisexual, with five white petals, five green sepals, and five stamens. Flowers can cover the entire plant for about 2 to 3 weeks, typically in late February to mid March in Southwest Florida. It is the earliest flowering *Viburnum*. Sporadic bloom may occur throughout the summer on some plants. The fruit is an elliptical drupe, laterally flattened, not fleshy, initially green, turning reddish and finally dark blue or black at maturity.



Leaf margins are often finely toothed.



The inflorescence is a convex cyme.



The fruit is a small drupe that matures dark blue or black.



February 15



February 28



March 14

### Planting and Maintenance Guidelines

Walter's viburnum may be utilized in the landscape as a small tree, a fine-textured clipped hedge, or as a tall screen or high groundcover. It is so slow growing that it can be planted under or near utility lines and can be easily kept in check. It's an excellent choice for bird habitat given its thick evergreen foliage and prolific abundance of fruits by some varieties.

Walter's viburnum can be planted in partial shade but will bloom more profusely in full sun. All Walter's viburnum varieties and cultivars appear to have very low drought tolerance when first planted and when grown in containers. Water frequently for the first six months to one year after planting. Once

established, it usually does not require supplemental irrigation, except during the driest of months. It can produce suckers that can be easily controlled and rarely forms thickets in South Florida. Clip the plant as desired or let it grow wild as it will not easily become unruly. When trained as a hedge, prune it two or three times a year or as needed. For a flowering hedge, prune after flowering in March and again no later than August. Many of the dwarf cultivars are more problematic than the taller varieties.



An informal Walter's viburnum hedge in full bloom. Mid-February, Estero, Florida.



A formal Walter's viburnum hedge probably one of the dwarf cultivars. Fort Myers, Florida

### **Pests and Diseases**

Walter's viburnum can develop root rot (*Rhizoctonia solani*; *Pythium spp.*) if not fully established and left in standing water. Monitor for aphids, scales, thrips, whiteflies, and mites. Nematodes can also become a problem. Problem samples can be sent to the University of Florida labs for confirmation.



Aphids on new spring growth.

### References

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