



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## *Viburnum obovatum*<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Walter Viburnum, in the opinion of some nursery growers, is the very best Viburnum for use in central and south Florida. Unfortunately, it is not widely available. It is a shrub or small tree that can grow to a height of about 25 feet. However, there are forms of this plant that are upright, spreading, weeping or dwarf. It is difficult to determine which form you are buying by simply looking at the plant. The only way to determine the ultimate height and shape of the plant is to know the original source of the plant material. A reputable nursery will know the characteristics of their plants. The evergreen leaves of Walter Viburnum vary from very small to medium sized, glossy, leathery, and dark green. They are also fragrant when crushed. The winter or spring flowers occur in small, convex cymes held at the branch tips before new growth emerges. Flowers can cover the plant with white blooms for about 2 or three weeks. The fruits of this plant are small drupes that turn from red to black during maturation.

### General Information

**Scientific name:** *Viburnum obovatum*

**Pronunciation:** vye-BER-num ah-boe-VAY-tum

**Common name(s):** Blackhaw, Walter Viburnum

**Family:** *Caprifoliaceae*

**Plant type:** tree

**USDA hardiness zones:** 7 through 10 (Fig. 1)

**Planting month for zone 7:** year round

**Planting month for zone 8:** year round

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Planting month for zone 10:** year round

**Origin:** native to Florida

**Uses:** espalier; superior hedge; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; screen; border; attracts butterflies; residential street tree; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size)

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

### Description

**Height:** 8 to 25 feet

**Spread:** 6 to 10 feet

**Plant habit:** oval

**Plant density:** dense

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** fine

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** revolute; serrate

**Leaf shape:** obovate

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

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Figure 1. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Flower**

**Flower color:** white  
**Flower characteristic:** spring flowering

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** oval  
**Fruit length:** less than .5 inch  
**Fruit cover:** fleshy  
**Fruit color:** black  
**Fruit characteristic:** attracts birds

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; no thorns; not particularly showy  
**Current year stem/twig color:** gray/silver  
**Current year stem/twig thickness:** thin

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun

**Soil tolerances:** occasionally wet; acidic; alkaline; sand; loam; clay;  
**Drought tolerance:** high  
**Soil salt tolerances:** poor  
**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

**Other**

**Roots:** usually not a problem  
**Winter interest:** no special winter interest  
**Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding  
**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive  
**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

**Use and Management**

Walter Viburnum may be utilized in the landscape as a fine-textured, clipped hedge or tall screen. Small leaves make it a great candidate for shearing into a topiary, espalier or formal hedge. Older specimens can be trained into small trees with several trunks. Nurseries can also train young plants to grow in this manner.

Walter Viburnum will grow well in a site that receives full sun or shade. It is native to acidic wetland forests which are frequently inundated for a period of time during the year, but it tolerates a broad range of growing conditions including moderate drought.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern.