



## FALL COLORS

### Landscape Choices

While for some people a drive through one of our state and local parks is an autumn ritual, many of the same colors and effects are achievable without leaving home. Whether you have a small fenced garden or a sprawling acreage, a wealth of interesting choices exists for those who have full sun and the space to put one or more of these selections. (Some of the following plants do perfectly well in shade. However, the brilliance of their color depends on sunlight and without it, they will not be as vibrant.)

Unusual horizontal branching patterns typify *Nyssa sylvatica* (Black gum or tupelo). This tree requires some breathing room as it will grow up to 50' but the rewards include exquisite orange and scarlet foliage accompanied by blue-black berries. Its charms aren't limited to October either. Glossy green leaves reflect light all summer long and grow along the entire length of its branches, providing hummingbirds and warblers with a perfect place to perch.

Somewhat shorter and a native of Persia, *Parrotia persica* belongs to the Witch-hazel family. This shrub-like tree has tooth-edged leaves that turn vivid orange, red, and yellow in fall. For its first 10-15 years, it will have a shrubby habit and then will grow on to become a tall multi-stemmed tree.

*Quercus coccinea* (Scarlet oak) lives up to its common name with its elegantly shaped flame-red leaves. This tree requires plenty of space, growing over 80 feet tall and 10 feet in girth. But, for those with the room, this tree will tolerate relatively dry conditions and there are few others as stately.

It isn't necessary though to have an estate to achieve dramatic effects. There are a number of smaller plants that combine color with interesting forms. When planted individually or in a group across from an outdoor seating area or window, they can provide a fabulous vista. Here are a few suggestions:

*Acer ginnala* (Amur maple) is a graceful little tree from Northern China. Extremely hardy, it can survive rather imperfect conditions, turning vivid crimson in the fall. When planted in a row, it makes a good deciduous privacy hedge and can be grown as a shrub or trimmed to become an interesting single-stemmed tree. Summer seed coloration is also often spectacular.

For those with acid soil, *Aronia arbutifolia* (Red chokeberry) is an ideal companion to rhododendrons and azaleas. After providing autumn effects, its profusion of red berries will remain throughout the winter if not taken by the birds.

Another shrub that provides year-round beauty is *Viburnum prunifolium*. Its wide spreading branches with their colorful fruits and foliage are an outstanding autumn feature in a naturalized setting.

*Hydrangea quercifolia* (Oakleaf hydrangea) is a stunning small shrub in every season. Deeply veined leathery green leaves turn dark red in the fall providing a beautiful contrast to creamy white-flowered panicles that gradually attain a rosy hue as cold weather approaches. Rarely growing more than four feet tall, this handsome shrub has exfoliating bark, lending winter interest as well.

Urban gardens that offer only a wall can still produce color in the form of vines. Both *Parthenocissus tricuspidata* (Boston Ivy) and *P. quinquefolia* (Virginia creeper) produce superb autumn reds, are extremely hardy, and require only a relatively small patch of ground for their root systems.

All of these plants should be selected and planted in September or October when you can see for yourself the characteristics of their coloration. Care for trees and shrubs planted at this time of year are the same as in the spring except that during dry periods it's absolutely critical that the plants receive adequate water before winter arrives.

**Come in for suggestions and help with your colorful planting.**

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