

**Janet B. Carson**  
**Extension Horticulture Specialist**  
**Arkansas Democrat-Gazette**  
**Native Plants for Fall – August 19, 2017**

School is back in session, football season has begun so fall must be on the horizon, even though the temperatures don't always feel fall-like, but I am not complaining about the summer we had this year! I am always preaching to gardeners to expand their plant palette and make sure they have something with color in every season, including fall. Since we are about to head into that season let's check out some options for fall color using native plants.

Many of the shade trees and ornamental trees in our landscapes are native, from oaks and maples to tulip poplar, dogwoods and redbuds. For fall color, dogwoods have great red color, while maples can be red, yellow or orange. Some underutilized native trees include the blackgum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) that turns brilliant red in the fall, sourwood (a member of the azalea family) has beautiful flowers in the summer and brilliant red fall foliage. Another mid-sized native tree is the sassafras with three different shaped leaves on the same plant and brilliant shades of yellow and red fall foliage. The native pawpaw is also an interesting understory tree and I have seen several that are loaded with fruits this year. There are separate male and female trees, but they are pretty with or without fruit.

For shrubs nothing is prettier with fall color than itea and oakleaf hydrangea. Both turn deep red in mid-fall and the color persists for some time. Both of these plants have showy white blooms in late spring for itea and early to mid-summer for oakleaf hydrangeas, so double duty color with fall foliage is a bonus. Witchhazel and fothergilla are two more showstoppers with fall color and both have fragrant blooms in the spring. There are several species of witch hazels with a variety of times of bloom. The common witch hazel (*H. virginiana*) peaks between mid-October and mid-November while the spring-flowering witch hazels can start blooming by the end of December or early January depending upon our winter weather, but peak bloom is usually between mid-January and mid-March.

For fall and early winter blooming shrubs consider Clethra or summersweet. It is a great partial shade to sun plant that is still blooming. Flowers come in pink or white.

There are numerous species of sumac that can be grown in the landscape. The ones that grace our interstates would take over in your garden, but the cutleaf staghorn sumac and the low growing fragrant sumac both make great additions to the garden and give great texture all season and colorful foliage in the fall. The star of the garden in the fall can be the callicarpa commonly called Beautyberry or French Mulberry. First come the showy clusters of bright pink, lavender or white blooms, and add to that the yellow fall foliage and you have a showstopper. This plant will grow in sun or shade and is quite easy to care for. There are several other berry producers for fall show, including Hearts a'burstin euonymus, Red chokeberry, and there is the show stopping deciduous holly that loses its leaves and then showcases its bright red, orange or yellow berries. As with all hollies, there is a separate male and separate female plant. Only the females have the showy berries.

A group of plants that really sings in the garden are annuals and perennials. Perennials are plants that come back each year, while annuals we do have to replant each season. For fall blooming perennials, there plenty of options. The summer blooming Echinacea (Coneflowers), Gaillardia (Indian Blanket) and the Rudbeckia (Black-eyed Susan) have all been blooming for a few months but they will continue to bloom into fall and early winter. Liatris has showy purple spikes of blooms with, dark purple blooms on ironweed (Veronia) and huge purple clusters on Joe-Pye Weed. Add yellow to the color palette with goldenrod (Solidago). This plant will not make you sneeze, as the pollen is too large to fly, but new varieties like 'Fireworks' and 'Golden Fleece' are amazing plants in the garden. They are drought tolerant and will easily bloom for 6-8 weeks in full sun. Turtlehead (Chelone) has beautiful clusters of pink or white blooms and do well in the shade. Cardinal flower lobelia will add vibrant red spikes of color in moist areas in sun to partial shade, and the white spikes of Culver's Root are still going strong in sun to partial shade. There is also a huge group of composite flowers that are in bloom or will be soon. From asters in shades of pink, purple and white to the narrow-leaved and saw-toothed sunflowers which are covered in yellow sunflowers on plants that can be 5-12 feet tall. The lavender blue Chicory is covering our roadsides now and will continue to bloom through October. If you are a fan of the coffee in New Orleans, it is supplemented with chicory. A few to use with caution. Members of the Eupatorium family are prolific performers in the fall with pink or white blooms. They include Boneset, White Snakeroot and Mist Flower Ageratum. While the bees and butterflies adore them, they can spread, so pay attention.

Some great annual natives for late season color include Bidens with yellow coreopsis-like blooms. Lemon horsemint (*Monarda citriodora*) has small spikes of blooms in pink and lavender and are a bee magnet! The wild poinsettia (*Euphorbia cyathophora*) is a pass-along plant with blooms that resemble a small poinsettia. Another euphorbia is the old-fashioned Snow-on-the Mountain (*Euphorbia marginata*).

We are fortunate that we have so many options of plants that thrive in sun or shade, wet or dry conditions. Our growing season seems to get longer every year, so when choosing plants for your garden, look at what is available. You don't have to just plant natives, or just azaleas, or just dogwoods. A mixed garden with a large plant palette makes a gardening interesting in every season. By choosing some natives, you will also be helping the native insects and animals.