

Fall

The extreme heat of August is not kind to us or our plants. If your plants are living when fall arrives, much less blooming, you know this is one tough plant. You may need to add some color to your landscape now to aid in recovery. Look for the fall bloomers, and you can have color every year in the fall.

There are plants for fall color in every grouping -- annuals, perennials, shrubs and trees. For the annuals, if you can find them, you can replant petunias, begonias and lantana. They will continue to perform up until a frost, and with the late frosts we've had in recent years, that is a good two months away. Summer annuals that are still looking good, should be kept. Replacements for fall, which should last all winter include pansies, viola's, snapdragons, calendulas, flowering kale and cabbage, Dianthus, and dusty miller. Parsley is a good green fill, as are the leaf lettuces. These latter two give you color, plus something edible. There are some other greens which can add color, from 'Bright Lights' Swiss chard, to some of the red beets and colorful leaf lettuces.

For perennials, there are numerous choices and a variety is always good. Everyone is familiar with the garden mums, which come in several colors and flower types. There are also asters available, in shades of pink, purple and white. In addition there is tricyrtis -- or toad lily, with a nice display of speckled flowers in shades of white, purple and pink; goldenrod with its plumes of gold flowers; sedums -- from the large flowered *Sedum spectabilis* to shorter varieties; fall blooming anemones -- *Anemone X hybrida* for a beautiful pink or white flower, *Amsonia*, well loved for its blue star flowers in the spring, but it also has outstanding fall foliage. The hardy *ageratum* is in bloom now, and its relative, Joe Pye weed may just be finishing. Many of the *salvias* kick in with the cool days of fall. A good choice is *salvia leucanthea*. While most hardy hibiscus are dying down, the *Hibiscus mutabilis* or confederate rose blooms in October with powderpuff pink flowers. While not hardy in the northern parts of the state, it does well in the southern two thirds. There are late blooming sunflowers, and ferns always look good. Don't forget all the ornamental grasses. Fall is their season to shine, with wonderful seed heads and graceful foliage.

There are a number of interesting shrubs for the fall and winter landscape. Beautyberry or French mulberry -- *callicarpa* has wonderful clusters of purple or white berries; burning bush with its fiery red color; the lowly *nandina* shines in the fall and winter with outstanding foliage color and on the standards, a wealth of red berries. Sumac can't be beat for fall color, and we're beginning to see new varieties with an array of heights and growth habits. Witch hazels and fothergillas both have outstanding fall foliage, and their winter or early spring blooms are another welcome addition. *Euonymus americanus* or strawberry bush, another native has lovely pink fruits which burst open to expose bright colored seeds. *Itea* has lovely fall foliage, as do oakleaf hydrangea, whose burgundy foliage persists well into winter. *Sasanqua camellia*'s will begin to bloom in the cooler days of fall. Depending on variety, they can bloom from October through January -- a great way to add color to the garden. They come in a variety of sizes and flower colors. Blueberry bushes are a great way to incorporate edible landscaping. Not only do they produce wonderful berries, but the bushes turn various stages of red as they head into winter. Butterfly bushes or buddleia will recoup from the heat and bloom up until frost, and roses can produce well into fall, with many varieties producing large rosehips which give another dimension of color to the fall and winter garden. Speaking of fruits, deciduous holly with its cluster of red berries all winter really shines as their leaves fall. Smoke bush (*Cotinus*) has colorful foliage that is attractive throughout the season, but it really heats up in fall, deepening to

brilliant shades of purple, red, or orange_yellow, depending on the variety. As the large, loose clusters of tiny greenish flower blossoms fade, the flower stalks get longer and by midsummer are covered with fuzzy purple or pink hairs. These feathery trusses look like puffs of smoke -- hence the common name smoke bush or smoke tree.

There are also numerous vining plants to add to the color scene this fall. The old fashioned bittersweet, with its clusters of orange berries. Virginia creeper has outstanding red fall foliage, and sweet autumn clematis with its fragrant white flowers. A lesser known vine: porcelain berry - Ampelopsis is a rampant vining plant whose berries turn from an ivory to metallic blue in the fall. And Boston ivy is another fall foliage producer.

When it comes to fall foliage and trees, everyone is worried about the color change this year. Of course, those trees that shut down early, won't have any color, but for the remaining trees, the jury is still out. If we continue to get showers, and gradual cooling off, we may have a pretty fall yet. Some good color producers normally, include: Blackgum, Chinese pistache, blackhaw, dogwoods, red and sugar maples, gingko, sweetgum, red oak and sourwood. Flowering pears, including Bradford pears are also outstanding in their fall foliage, but have become extremely over planted. Crape myrtle trees can also have outstanding fall foliage.

Some may think when fall begins the gardening season has ended. But truth be told, fall is an ideal time to plant most plants -- from annuals and perennials, to trees and shrubs. While you're at it, throw in some spring blooming bulbs to add to the mix next year, they are arriving at nurseries now too. Visit your local garden center, see what is available and lets get some color back into our gardens.