

## Plan and Plant for Fall Color

by Candace Mullen, Bell County Master Gardener

One thing some of us transplanted Texans miss is the vivid and striking colors of fall in the northern states. There is just something about crisp mornings, falling rainbows of colorful leaves, and vast vistas of hardwood trees in their changing colors that seem to prepare you for the winter season. So of course, we would like to see those beautiful colors in Texas also. In order for that to happen you have to plan and plant both long and short term for your landscape.

Some of us may even wonder how those colors come from ordinary looking green plants. The color and amount of color each plant achieves during fall season is determined by the day length, temperature, and moisture. As the length of the days decrease, the amount of green pigment (chlorophyll) produced decreases and eventually stops. As the green pigment disappears, all we see is the other plant pigments that remain: red, yellow, and a mixture of both to produce a wide array of oranges. The yellow color is produced by the pigment that produces sugars for chlorophyll, and the red pigment is produced and affected by acidity. That means the more acidic the soil the more brilliant the red! Color and intensity will change from year to year depending on soil condition, moisture, and temperatures.

Now is the time to consider adding a few trees to your landscape that will add some color in the fall for years to come. Here are a few tree selections to consider: Maple (red/oranges/yellows); Serviceberry (reds, oranges, yellows), honey locust (golden); oaks (reds/browns); quaking aspen (golden), birch (golden), linden (yellow), white ash (purple), redbud (yellow), dogwood (reddish purple), smoke tree (yellow to red orange with purple), and ash (bright yellow). Check to see if they do well in your soil first and ask for other examples for our area.

Part of that planning and planting should include bushes and shrubs, too. They can be added to the landscape now to provide enjoyment for years to come. Some selections could include Nandina heavenly bamboo (scarlet and shades of red with red berries), Nandina Alba (golden foliage and white berries) barberry (reddish purple), Amur maple (orange/red), burning bush *Euonymus alatus* (brilliant red), sumac, non poisonous, fragrant (brilliant red), Tor spirea (crimson, copper), various viburnums (shades of purple/bronze, deep red, scarlet with red berries), azaleas (red), Beauty berry (yellow with purple berries), blueberry (crimson), and chokeberry (reds/purple). Again, check for the kinds that like your soil and yard situations.

Perennial choices also provide great color and fall enjoyment. Some of them actually start to gear up and look their best in the fall! The wonderful Sedum is a prime example. Several examples of Sedum that are very heat tolerant and give good fall color are Autumn Joy (pink flowers), Matrona (red stems, reddish grey leaves, pink flowers), Brilliant (hot pink), and Vera Jameson (bronze leaves with magenta flowers). The butterflies also love them!

Fall Asters are another example with the added benefits of attracting butterflies and supplying nectar for them. These examples all bloom between August and October: Alma Potschke (rose pink), Lady in Black (blackish purple leaves, white flowers), Purple Dome (purple flowers), Wood's Light Blue (clear blue flowers), Wood's Pink (clear pink flowers), and Wood's Purple (deep purple flowers).

Let us not forget the Rudbeckia (black eyed Susan), Russian Sage (purple blooms), Purple Coneflower (pinkish or white blooms), Anemone (pink bloom), Mexican Mint Marigold (golden blooms), Celastrus bittersweet vine (orange-red berries), Virginia Creeper Vine (brilliant red), Wisteria (reddish color), Joe Pye Weed (pink blooms), Copper Canyon Daisy (golden blooms and delightful scent), and various salvias. There are also fall blooming Iris and various lilies to add to the plant pallet.

Of course, the most popular and most widely known fall showcase perennial is the garden Mum. It now comes in an impossibly wide variety of colors, sizes, and shapes! The varieties that have been developed make it impossible for a gardener to choose just one. The difficulty I have is finding the space to put in all the varieties I want to try! Try a few; they will reward you year after year with wonderful fall color. Just pinch the buds back all summer until about August then let them grow away!

Grass beds are becoming quite popular these days. They also add great fall color to your yards and most

often provide food for the birds with the seed heads. Here are a few varieties to try that will help your yard glow. Flame grass, *miscanthus purpureus* (bright orange-red) and *malepartus* Flame grass; Silver Feather grass *Silberfeder* (large silvery plumes); Giant silver grass *floridulus* (reddish color); little blue stem (red-orange), purple fountain grass (purple/burgundy), and spike grass, *spodiopogon sibericus* (burgundy fall color).

There are also many annuals out there that will provide instant color, variety and allow the gardener to experiment every fall! You might consider the ornamental peppers (reds, purples, greens), ornamental Kale (pinks, purples), pansies (purples, yellows, lavender, white) and the ever, popular marigold, many colors and varieties abound (rusts, golds, reds, bronzes).

Of course we can't forget the pumpkins, gourds, and squashes that show the traditional fall colors and provide visual interest! They provide wonderful splashes of fall color and bring us right into the Halloween season when the little ones visit to collect their treats. We all need treats for our eyes to help us get through the winter blues, even in Texas. So do consider adding some wonderful colors and textures to your landscape to brighten everyone's day as we pass by your yard!