

This is one of my favorite times of the year. It often seems dreary, cold and damp but I love what this weather does to the foliage on all our plants. Nature is painting everything with colors unimaginably vivid. We are especially lucky to live where the gold, chartreuse, orange, yellow, umber, cinnamon, garnet and bright autumn colors are accented by the dark greens of our Native evergreen plants.

It's the perfect time of year to visit your favorite local nursery or garden center and pick up a few plants for fall color. You'll be able to see how the plants will look next fall when they display their splendor in your own garden. It's also one of the best times to plant trees and shrubs. Plants are going into dormancy and will spend energy growing roots. Our dry spell has passed and we'll have plenty of fall, winter and spring rain to quench and nourish them.

Much of the literature you've probably read says to add peat moss, compost and potting soil to the planting hole, but this is not a good idea. If you amend the hole the plant will grow happily in that small space and won't send out roots into the rest of your garden soil. After using up all the enrichments the plant eventually dies or fails to thrive. The exception is if you've had to till up and amend your whole gardening area.

You won't need to fertilize either; most plants from nurseries and garden centers have enough slow release fertilizer to last them several years (and that's not an exaggeration.) Don't forget to water your plant on planting day and each week after unless the monsoons begin and Mother Nature waters for you.

Be sure to check out Japanese Maples, blueberries, azaleas, rhododendrons, red and yellow twig dogwood, and many of the viburnum and hydrangeas available this time of year, each with it's own unique and striking fall brilliance. The following paragraphs describe some of my favorite fall plants. All except *Callicarpa* are happily growing in our garden.

This year we'll add *Callicarpa*, commonly called beautyberry, a deciduous shrub with tiny, long-lasting, brilliant lavender-purple bb-size berries all up and down its stems. If you see it you'll want it. *Origanum* (ornamental oregano) is a non-edible perennial plant. Our *Origanum* has long dark stems festooned with flowers that resemble wheat sheaves, except with minute grains. Each flower is deep dark purple. The flower-strewn stems dry easily (almost instantly) and work well in arrangements and wreaths.

*Oxydendrum arboreum* (a deciduous small tree) has brilliant orange and red fall foliage. Mixed in with the brilliant leaves are lily-of-the-valley-like flowers. The flowers stay on the tree all winter. During the growing season the leaves are shiny and appear evergreen. *Oxydendrum arboreum* is commonly called Sourwood Tree. Most books say it will grow 20 to 50 feet tall. Our tree is seven years old and is only fifteen feet tall so far. It seems to grow about one foot per year.

Another excellent, fairly small tree is *Amelanchier*. It can also be a shrub and is commonly called Juneberry, shadblow and serviceberry. The fall color is magnificent with brilliant red and orange hues. It's the earliest plant to bloom in our garden in the spring with each branch covered with bright white blossoms. Varieties *A. alnifolia* grow to 20 feet, *A. Canadensis* grows to 25 feet, and *A. laevis* grows to 40 feet.

*Schizostylis* is a perennial rhizome. The leaves emerge in early to mid summer and resemble day lily leaves. Starting in September long stems covered with five to ten flowers emerge and can continue emerging into May. Each flower bud is star shaped and colors range from salmon-pink to dark red. *Schizostylis* is also known as: Kaffir lily, crimson flag and scarlet river lily. It's one of my very favorite flowers. Most books recommend planting this delightful flower in full sun, but it will do well in semi shade too. Many nurseries sell gallon containers. Plant *Schizostylis* and you'll have abundant flowers for years to come.

Two of our favorite evergreen azaleas for color are Hino crimson and *Stewartstonianum*. My husband talked me into buying them and I'm glad he did. Hino crimson has tiny, deep red, abundant blossoms in early spring. *Stewartstonianum*'s blossoms are orange-red. The foliage on both azaleas is dark green turning bronze in the fall, lasting all winter. Both varieties are gorgeous throughout all four seasons. So far both varieties have been resistant to azalea leaf gall too.

What are you waiting for? Trek on down to your local nursery and pick up a few plants for fall color.

*You can email comments to Peg at [gardenmentor@yahoo.com](mailto:gardenmentor@yahoo.com) or in care of this newspaper.*