

Autumn Colour and Interest

Any tree or shrub that marks the end of summer and the passage into winter dormancy by a fanfare of glorious leaf colour is worthy of serious consideration for the garden. If they're also interesting at other times of year – perhaps in their flowers, or bark, or berries – then they're well on their way to justifying a place.

Deciduous Trees for Colour

Our Acer glade offers so much that is good in the autumn that it's difficult to know which ones to recommend. All *Acer palmatum* cultivars and *Acer palmatum dissectum* cultivars give good autumn colour. Our gold medal for brilliant autumn colour goes to *A. palmatum* 'Osakazuki' whose 7-lobed leaves turn red and are held for a prolonged period before leaf-fall.

Amelanchier lamarckii - we love this tree with its white flowers opening against fresh bronze leaves in spring, green leaves over summer and rich red autumn colour. It doesn't thrive on poor or alkaline soils, but tolerates drought and full sun.

Birch species and cultivars, such as *Betula pendula* and *B. utilis* 'Jacquemontii' have leaves that turn a gloriously buttery-yellow in the autumn, falling to reveal beautiful bark and delicate twigs that ripple gracefully, even on the stillest day.

Cercidiphyllum japonicum – the Katsura Tree – often gives a spectacular display of yellows and purples in autumn and the fallen leaves smell of burnt sugar. It tolerates some lime, but grows best on neutral to acid soils and tends to give its best autumn colour when grown on these.

Ginkgo biloba – the only tree in its family and a survivor from before the time of the dinosaurs, has beautiful mid-green leaves that turn buttery-yellow in autumn. A very unfussy tree.

Liquidambar styraciflua – the Sweet Gum has maple-shaped leaves that turn reds, oranges and yellows in autumn. We love *L. styraciflua* 'Worplesdon' whose bright green leaves turn fantastic colours in autumn, especially on neutral to acid soils.

Nyssa sylvatica – the Tupelo is another tree with attractive foliage that gives a gorgeous display of autumn colour, which is best of all when it's grown in acid soil.

Many of the flowering cherries give good autumn colour. We particularly like *Prunus serrula*, the Tibetan Cherry, whose leaves turn red and yellow in autumn and fall to reveal the glorious, glossy, chestnut-brown bark.

Rhus typhina and varieties – the Stag's Horn Sumach – offer excellent autumn colour, is unfussy as to soil as long as it is moist but well-drained.

Most of the Rowans, or Mountain Ashes, have excellent autumn colour on their pinnate leaves (the leaf is made up of smaller leaflets). These range from the native *Sorbus aucuparia* to *Sorbus cashmiriana* – the Kashmir Rowan – a beautiful Rowan, ideal for a smaller garden, whose white berries hang on well into the winter as they're a bit too large for birds to eat. We particularly like *Sorbus* 'Eastern Promise' – a pink-berried Rowan whose green leaves turn purple then fiery red in autumn

Deciduous Shrubs

Aronia arbutifolia 'Brilliant' – the Choke Bush, has dark green leaves that turn red in autumn

Cornus florida varieties – we love these large shrubs – the bare bark is an interesting colour, the spring flowers are showy in the extreme, the foliage is interesting and the autumn colour is a spectacular show of reds and purples.

Cornus mas – the Cornelian Cherry – dark green leaves turn reddish-purple in autumn – and its not too many months then to wait for the tiny yellow flowers which appear on the bare stems in earliest spring.

The Witch Hazels – another plant with a long period of interest as it produces its flowers on bare stems over winter. The autumn colour is magnificent, vivid reds and yellows appearing together on the large leaves. A particular favourite of ours is *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Arnold Promise' with its upright habit and golden flowers.

Hydrangea quercifolia – the Oak-leaved Hydrangea produces a deep red autumn colour on leaves that hang on the plant well into the final months of the year. We particularly like the pink-flowered *H. quercifolia* 'Alice' and the double-flowered *H. quercifolia* 'Harmony'.

Fruits and Berries

Callicarpa bodinieri 'Profusion' – small, round, violet berries cluster along the bare stems until the birds eventually eat them

Corylus avellana, *C. avellana* 'Contorta' and *C. avellana* 'Contorta Pendula' – all bear edible hazelnuts

Ficus carica – the Fig – edible fruit, wonderful when eaten warm from the plant

Malus 'Evereste', *Malus florientina* and *Malus* 'Red Sentinel' are all Crab Apples we like. The fruit persists well into late autumn and is useful for attracting birds to the garden

As well as strong autumn colour, the Rowan or Mountain Ash produces berries. The white berries of *Sorbus cashmiriana* last well into winter, *S.* 'Eastern Promise' produces pink berries, while *S. aucuparia*, the native Rowan, orange-red berries. Other varieties produce yellow, orange and pinky-purple berries.