

### Beautiful Fall Colors Choices

One of the most desirable characteristics in landscape plants is beautiful fall color. Unfortunately, in Utah and the Intermountain West, many trees traditionally sold at garden centers will not have that expected fall color when they are brought home and planted in the landscape. Trees such as sugar maple, silver maple, red maple and American sweet gum are commonly available at local garden centers, but can struggle in our alkaline soils due to the inability to uptake sufficient amounts of iron. Often people try to offset this by supplementing the soil with products containing iron, but success can be sporadic. A better solution for a colorful fall landscape includes utilizing plants better adapted to our unique climate.

Our own native bigtooth maple is probably the best tree to use locally for excellent fall color. It is often found on hillsides and in canyons and gives our mountains their spectacular autumn color. Be careful when purchasing this tree from local garden centers, however. Often it has been grafted onto the root system of another less adapted tree and fall color is usually lacking. Specifically ask for seed grown stock when purchasing.

Another group of small trees that offers excellent fall color is the sumac family. These are very drought adapted and can reach 20 to 30 feet high and 15 to 20 feet wide, depending on the species. Sumacs thrive on neglect. If they are over-watered and/or over-fertilized, they can spread into areas that are not desired. If you need small trees, look for either smooth or staghorn sumac. Gro-lo sumac is a low growing variety that can be used as a groundcover. Serviceberries are known for their fall foliage and many species are adapted to the area. Natives such as the Saskatoon or Utah serviceberries can be used in areas where a tree will not fit. However, there are also tree forms of serviceberry that will reach 20 feet high and wide. Fall color on the same plant can vary from yellow to orange and red.

Smokebush is another shrub or small tree that offers great fall color. Leaves will progress to a brilliant shade of orange to dark red, depending on the cultivar. If it can be located, American smokebush is especially spectacular. Smokebush grows 10 to 20 feet high and wide and is very tolerant of hard pruning in the spring.

Other plants that offer vibrant fall color include Japanese Zelkova (red-orange), American linden (brilliant yellow), hawthorns (red), flowering cherries (yellow-orange), flowering pear (orange-red), green-leafed barberries, European and American cranberry bush viburnums (red), some cotoneasters (red), switch grass (bronze) and Rocky Mountain maple (yellow-red).

The following plants can also be used in the yard and offer great fall color, but use caution. Boston ivy and Virginia creeper are commonly used vines that turn scarlet red in the fall. They hold their color for a long period, but the plants seed readily and may become a nuisance. Burning bush is well known for its fall color, but it can be finicky in the landscape. It often requires extra fertilizer and is somewhat susceptible to root fungal diseases and spider mites. Finally, Amur maple (sometimes called flame maple) is somewhat susceptible to iron chlorosis. It generally grows well in areas that have well drained soil and when it is not overwatered.