

## FALL COLOR OF TREES AND SHRUBS

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We had a decent year for fall color in trees and shrubs. A year like this shows which plants can have beautiful fall color when conditions are right. Shorter days, cool nights, sunshine and good moisture are ideal conditions for fall colors to be unmasked.

Short days and falling temperatures signal trees and shrubs to quit producing the green pigment chlorophyll. As chlorophyll breaks down, the pigments masked by chlorophyll are then shown.

When fall colors appear, people often want to plant those trees and shrubs. This is great, but before selecting a plant check out its other characteristics. Be sure it will be a quality plant year round and not only for a few weeks during fall.

If red fall color and a high quality tree are important to you, consider planting an oak. Red, Shumard or scarlet are three oaks recommended for Nebraska. White oak can have dusty red fall color. The newer hybrid elm ‘Frontier’ is noted for its burgundy fall color.

Red maple and Autumn-blaze maple can have outstanding red or reddish-orange fall color. Before buying one, be aware both have softer wood that is more subject to wind and ice damage. In certain soils, both can develop iron chlorosis and decline. If you can live with these bad points, go ahead and plant these trees in the right locations.

Orange fall color is harder to come by. Many trees have brownish orange fall color, but for a true orange Table Rock sugar maple is one of our few choices. Sugar maples are not as heat tolerant as other maples and are best planted in protected locations with adequate moisture. Table Rock is a selection from Nebraska and considered more heat tolerant.

Some serviceberries, also known as Juneberry, have beautiful orange fall color in the right years, as will some crabapple cultivars. Autumn Brilliance serviceberry is a good choice. Prairifire and Indian Magic crabapples have reddish orange fall color.

An ornamental tree with red or burgundy fall color is ornamental or Callery pear. Unfortunately ornamental pear is overplanted and considered invasive in some states and planting these trees is best avoided.

Many trees have yellow fall color. A few quality shade trees that are not overplanted include Ginkgo, Kentucky coffeetree, bitternut hickory and many types of newer elm hybrids.

For shrubs, burning bush or *Euonymus alatus* is the one often selected. These are now overplanted and it would be wise to consider other shrubs for fall color. Many Viburnums, especially blackhaw Viburnum, are noted for their red fall color.

Other quality shrubs for fall color are oakleaf Hydrangea, Torr birchleaf spirea, red and black chokeberry, spicebush, beautyberry and fragrant Sumac. When it comes to shrubs, be sure to note plant size to be sure the shrub will not overgrow the planting site.

While fall color is a characteristic to look for, be sure other plant characteristics are also desirable. And know that fall color is fleeting. Only good in some years and short lived. Learn more about plants by asking at local garden centers or your local Extension office.