

Fall color in woody plants

Paul S Drobot
www.plantstogrow.com

In cooler climates fall color is a consideration in choosing plants for the landscape, since this is the plants finale farewell to the growing season. The color doesn't magically happen. It is controlled by, leaf color pigmentation and the environment.

Green leaves are green during the growing season because of the production of chlorophyll. As the growing season draws to an end, the temperature cools and the day length decreases. These two factors slows down and or stops the chlorophyll production. With less chlorophyll the other pigment have a chance to express their colors and maybe produced. Such as carotenoids (yellow, orange), anthocyanin (reds, blues, purples), xanthophyll (yellow), etc.

In some plants the foliage color is other than green. Such as Diablo Nine Bark (purple), Golden Heart Redbud (yellow), Ivory Halo Dogwood (white variegation). In these cases the other colored pigments dominate over the green. They may or may not have good fall color. Many times the fall color is a slight variation of the growing season color.

Fall color will be best when the plant has a good growing year, the fall is bright and cool with good soil moisture. Poor color seems to occur when the plants have had a poor growing season and the fall is wet, overcast and warm. This is a personal observation of mine.

Many plants have predictable fall color, while others color is unpredictable. The actual fall color can change from year to year. The Autumn Brilliance Juneberry in my yard usually has nice oranges with some red. But on other years it can be a muted yellow orange. Other plants will have mixtures of colors, usually one color is more prominent.

This not a comprehensive list. Just a survey of some woody plants with fall color that I have observed and are hardy to zone #5. Most of these can be accessed through my site www.plantstogrow.com for data and images of the plant.

Shrubs with red, maroons, purple, violet

Acer	Maple	Ginnila	depending on cultivar reds, oranges and yellow, can be brilliant
Aronia	Chokeberry	Black Choke berry	wine red to red
	Chokeberry	Red Choke Berry	red
Berberis	Barberry	Red Barberry	reds to maroons
	Barberry	Crimson Pygmy Barberry	maroons to brilliant red
	Barberry	Green Barberry	reds, reddish orange

	Barberry	Korean Barberry	reds
Cornus	Dogwood	Gray Dogwood	reddish to purple
	Dogwood	Silky Dogwood	reddish, purples, a bit of yellow with some green hanging around
	Dogwood	Prairie Fire	reds
	Dogwood	Arctic Fire	reds
	Dogwood	Red Twig	reds, sometimes yellow
Cotoneaster	Cotoneaster	Hedge	purples, reds, oranges
	Cotoneaster	Cranberry	red, bronzy red to purplish tones
	Cotoneaster	Hesse	red, bronzy red to purplish tones
Eunoymus	Burning Bush	Burning Bush	brilliant red mostly, sometimes weak pinks
Forsythia	Forsythia	Forsythia	purple, dark purple
Fothergilla	Fothergilla	Mt Airy	reds
Hydrangea	Hydrangea	Snow Queen	mahogany, purple, red
Itea	Itea	Henry's Garnet	red
Ninebark	Ninebark	Center Glow	not much change from growing season color, bronzy tinge in fall
	Ninebark	Summer Wine	not much change from growing season color, bronzy tinge in fall
Physocarpus	Ninebark	Diablo	maroon, bronzy maroon ting, close to summer color
	Cotoneaster	Peking	fair reds, oranges, purples
		Cranberry	bronzy reds and purplish
Rhododendron	Rhododendron	PJM	very nice purple
		Aglo	shades of red
Rhus	Sumac	Staghorn	red
	Sumac	Smooth	red
	Sumac	Cutleaf	red
	Sumac	Prairie Flame	red
	Sumac	Grow Low	sometimes brilliant reds and oranges, other times poor
	Sumac	Fragrant	reds, yellow and oranges, very good to fair
Rosa	Rosa	Meidiland Red	Deep burgundy red
Stephanandra	Stephanandra		red/purple and red/orange
Syringa	Lilac	Miss Kim	purples, reddish purple

	Lilac	Common	purples if the mildew isn't bad
	Lilac	Korean	reddish purple
Viburnum	Viburnums	Arrowwood	fair at best, yellows with orange
	Viburnums	Arrowwood cultivars	newer cultivars have better fall color
	Viburnums	Chicago Lustra	fair at best, yellow
	Viburnums	Juddi and Carlesi	purples
	Viburnums	Doublefile	red to maroon tones
	Viburnums	Cranberry Bush	fair at best, reds and oranges
	Viburnums	Blackhaw	red, purple to burgundy depending on the sun

Trees with reds and oranges

Acer	Maple	Red maple and cultivars	reds
	Maple	Autumn Blaze	red to brilliant red
	Maple	Sugar Maple and cultivars	reds and oranges
	Maple	Bonfire Maple	brilliant red to red orange
	Maple	Mountain Maple	Orange red to dark maroon red
Amerlancheir	Juneberry	Juneberry	Reds, oranges and sometimes yellows depending cultivars
	Juneberry	Autumn Brilliance	Reds and oranges sometimes orangey yellow
Pyrus	Bradford Pear		Red, can be brilliant
Quercus	Oak	Red Oak	mostly brown sometimes red
	Oak	White Oak	mostly brown sometimes red
Nyssa	Black Gum		brilliant red

Shrubs with yellow

Cornus	Dogwood	Yellow Twig	yellow
	Dogwood	Red Twig	yellow mixed with reds
Ribes	Current	Alpine Current	unpredictable yellow
	Current	Greenmound	yellow to fair yellow
Spirea	Spirea	Gold Flame	golden yellows, bronze tones

		Crispa	some years very nice yellow/ orangey yellow, other years fair at best
Ilex	Holly	Michigan Holly	yellow to bright yellow
Rhus	Sumac	Tiger Eyes	yellow with reds
Cotinus	Smoke Bush	Golden Spirit	yellows, golden yellows with some red tones
Caragana	Siberian Pea Shrub		yellow to greenish yellow
Syringa	Lilac	Royalty	yellow to fair yellow
Hamamelis	Vernal Witch Hazel		yellow
Cephalanthus	Button Bush		yellow
Hypericum	St John's Wort		yellow
Stephanandra	Stephanandra		yellow