



Shrubs that Brighten Your Landscape with Fall Color

The days are getting shorter. There are school supplies everywhere in the house. Football games are on TV. The calendar says it is still a week or so away. But fall is unofficially here, and it's time to think about setting your garden ablaze with the sizzling colors of autumn. Although the fiery red color is what we often associate with fall, thanks in part to the ubiquitous Burning Bush, there are other colors in the fall palette.

'Hummingbird' is a cultivar of the native plant known as Summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*). More compact than the native, 'Hummingbird' grows to about 3 to 5 foot tall with a similar spread. For about four weeks in midsummer, the shrub is covered with spikes of fragrant white flowers. It loves wet areas, but will grow in a regular garden location as well. Summersweet will grow in full sun to part shade. Don't fret if your plant doesn't leaf out at the first hint of warm weather. It is one of the later plants to emerge from winter dormancy. In autumn the foliage turns yellow to golden brown, usually holding this color for several weeks.



Summersweet holds its fall color for several weeks.

A small jump in height brings us to the 6 to 10 foot tall *Hamamelis vernalis*, or Vernal Witch Hazel. Vernal means spring and this shrub beats out almost every other in the early flowering category. Clusters of small flowers with yellow strap-like petals appear in March or even February. Vernal Which Hazel flowers best in full sun but it will take partial shade in most any soil type from gravelly to wet. Some years the fall color is almost chartreuse but in a good year it will be golden yellow. Similar in fall color, but different in many other aspects is the Common Witch Hazel, *Hamamelis virginiana*. One of those differences is size, with the

Common Witch Hazel reaching 20 or even 30 feet. Don't go looking for flowers on this plant in the early spring, like the Vernal Witch Hazel. Peak of its bloom is October to November.

If you're tired of looking up, then look down at your feet. That's where you'll see *Deutzia gracilis* 'Nikko'. An excellent ground-cover-like shrub suitable for full sun to part shade, 'Nikko' grows only 1 to 2 feet tall, but spreads up to 5 feet. In late April into May, the shrub is smothered in tiny white flowers held on small spikes. When the weather starts cooling off, the foliage slowly takes on a burgundy hue.

Many people enjoy Smokebush (*Cotinus coggryria*) both for their feathery flowers and deep purple summer foliage. However, many of the deepest purple Smokebush don't change much in color in autumn. The variety 'Nordine', which originated at the Morton Arboretum, while not as deep a purple in the summer, turns a brilliant yellow to orange in the fall. This upright 8 to 10 foot shrub is one of the hardiest and produces ruby red feathery "flowers" in midsummer.

A smaller shrub with orange or scarlet-orange fall foliage you likely have seen whether you realized it or not. *Rhus aromatica* 'Gro-low' is a tough, low growing plant with fragrant flowers and foliage. A mounding plant, 2 to 3 foot tall but spreading 5 to 6 feet wide, it is commonly used in parking islands, where it actually seems to thrive.

By looking at it, you'd never believe that 'Tiger Eyes' is closely related to 'Gro-low'. Both are Sumac, but any resemblance ends there. 'Tiger Eyes' is a 6-foot tall, bold shrub with lacy



The fall color of Go-low Sumac is spectacular.

golden summer foliage. It has an oriental look with upward angled branches and draping foliage, and the mix of yellow orange and scarlet fall colors are spectacular.

We've been looking at some alternatives to "fiery red" fall foliage. But if you want that red fall color of Burning Bush, why not try something different? *Aronia arbutifolia* 'Brilliantissima' or Red Chokeberry is a 6 to 8 foot tall upright shrub. The red in its name comes from the small brilliant red berries that follow the beautiful clusters of white flowers in spring. In autumn the dark green glossy foliage turns a brilliant red. Red Chokeberry will grow in full sun to part shade, but for best color and fruit production plant in full sun.