

Not Just for Fall Color – Trees and Shrubs

Fall is the best time of the year to plant trees and shrubs as this allows their root systems to establish and become healthy before the onset of the next growing season. But, before dropping those roots into the ground, ask yourself: “Do I really just want ‘fall color’?” Or, would I prefer to bring greater value to the landscape? Along with the obvious considerations for soil, light and location, the factors of color, texture, form and habitat are worthy of attention and study for ideal garden design.

Of these attributes, color first comes to mind. When flowers begin to fade, we look to fall foliage as an encore to the colorful show.

Pistacia chinensis (Chinese pistache), is an excellent choice for Oklahoma gardens, is largely disease and insect resistant, and can yield orange, red or yellow foliar color. *Ginkgo biloba* (Ginkgo), offers striking yellow foliage, and *Acer rubrum* (Red maple) is a showy red. Other examples of Oklahoma trees and shrubs are provided in the reference materials below that may complete your garden palette.

Foliage also delivers texture to the garden – different leaf shapes, sizes, patterns – yet, when those leaves are falling or gone, the bark remains. What dimensional and textural interest does it bear, and how might it contrast with its surroundings? Is it rough or smooth? Is it mottled, marked, variegated or solid colored? Is it peeling or flaking? Crepe myrtles and oak leaf hydrangeas have interesting, peeling bark, and *Cornus sericea* (Redtwig dogwood) sports beautiful, red, showy stems in winter.

As the bark becomes visible, so does the shape of the tree or shrub. Unusual growth habits of trees and shrubs provide a compelling structural centerpiece and dried seed pods, tall flower stalks, and twisting vines or stems contribute to the distinctive sculptural display. Consider *Corylus avellana* ‘*Contorta*’ (Henry Lauder’s Walking Stick) for its twisted habit, *Taxodium distichum* (Bald cypress) for its distinctive pyramidal form, and the *Ilex vomitoria* (Yaupon holly),

available in a weeping variety. Surprisingly, many of the evergreen options offer not only interesting shapes and forms, but also cover for wildlife in the winter.

Evergreens, optimally planted in dense layers by height, provide protective winter cover to wildlife. *Pyracantha coccinea* (Scarlet firethorn) is not only an evergreen, but can retain its fruits through winter, as can *Cotoneaster dammeri* (Bearberry cotoneaster). Both provide value in the landscape and for wildlife as a habitat shouldn't necessarily begin and end with nectar-producing flowers.

As the season winds down to fall, then to winter, our gardens can reveal another personality – something unique and intriguing – that the leaves concealed in summer. Consult some of the reference materials provided below and at <http://tulsamastergardeners.org> before planting this season. Selecting not only for color, but also for texture, form and habitat value will bring greater dimension and purpose to your landscape.

http://tulsamastergardeners.org/lawngarden/Trees%20For%20Tulsa_web.pdf

<http://factsheets.okstate.edu/documents/hla-6444-drought-tolerant-plant-selections-for-oklahoma/>