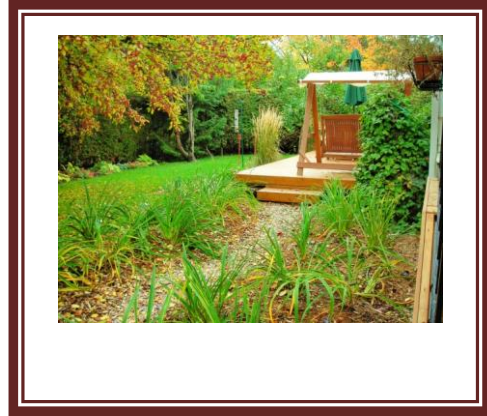


Explode Into Fall: Create an Autumn Garden

By Julianne Labreche

Fall gardens always seem to me like a crazy burst of fireworks at the end of a hot summer's day. Bang! A shade tree in the front yard explodes from fading green to flaming scarlet. Boom! A vine on the side of the house suddenly transforms itself from dull into a red-hot dazzler. Pop! Zap! Zing! Fall flowers burst forth from drab to dramatic.



Autumn is a time for color in the garden. It's a glorious time of year, full of rich, deep and earthy jeweled colors. While many gardeners focus on the spring garden, fall can be a spectacular season for planting. Say goodbye to blah pale pastels. Welcome crimson, gold, silver, burgundy, rusts and orange.

Don't put away those planting tools away just yet. Instead, make a plan and dig a fall garden. Head to the local nursery where there are often hot deals as the season progresses, at least for some plants. Or wait a little, until spring, when some plants need to be planted to ensure fall foliage. With some planning, you can create a final burst of color, a fitting finish to Ottawa's all-too-short but oh-so-beautiful gardening season.

Add Perennials for Color

There are many flowers that wait until late summer or fall to bloom. Consider planting asters, Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*), Joe Pye Weed (*Eupatorium*), Sneezeweed (*Helenium*) and hardy chrysanthemums.

Sedums such as Autumn Joy (*Sedum spectabile*), one of the most dependable and dazzling for fall color. They are easy to grow and require little care- just routine maintenance and a clean-up of dead foliage come spring. In return, they will provide nectar for departing Monarch butterflies and a spectacular display of red or bronze flowers against yellow leaves.

Plant Shrubs and Trees for Fall Foliage

Fall shrubs and trees come in many sizes and shapes to fit your garden plan, and budget. The twisted-shaped Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) or the ruby colored Barberry (*Berberis*) is sure to add visual interest to your garden. The exotic Smoke Bush (*Cotinus coggyria*) with its deep burgundy leaves in late summer, turning to red in fall, can be an head-turner. It's also a versatile shrub, suitable either in full sun or partial shade.

If you decide to plant a Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*), remember that's it's a large tree, so give it an open, sunny, big space well away from the house. It will reward you with lots of color, and leaves to rake.

Add a Fall Vine

Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus*), with its deep-red fall foliage and berries, is a delight for passers-by and a treat for migrating birds. It is a vigorous grower and may require vigorous pruning as the season progresses. This vine provides a dramatic backdrop for the garden come fall. It grows easily along the side of a fence or up a wall.

Create a Colorful Fall Container

By fall, container flowers planted in spring or summer are usually drab or dead. If so, dig them up and toss them into the compost heap. Start again with a fresh fall look. Flowering Kale (*Brassica oleracea* species), sometimes known as Flowering Cabbage, comes in many new varieties and is a stunner in a fall garden. These plants are very cold tolerant. A light frost actually will intensify their color.

Grow local and fill your container with fall vegetables. Swiss Chard, for example, with its crimson stems and dark green leaves is not only dramatic, but also edible. Annuals planted in spring, such as Sweet Potato Vine and Coleus, are also colorful additions to fall container gardens. Alternatively, a bright yellow, red or orange dahlia planted in spring should fill your container with bold flowers until the first hard frost.

Grow Golden Grasses

Come fall, many ornamental grasses are in their glory. Grasses are easy to grow and do well in average garden soil. Many of these grasses are best planted in spring, not fall, so check first with your local nursery.

Some of my favorites are the high, billowy Feather Reed Grass (*Calamagrostis x acutiflora*), the silvery Blue Oat Grass (*Helictotrichon sempervirens*) and the flowing Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*). Take care to avoid the aggressive ribbon grass that is very aggressive.

Tasks for Fall

- Rake up leaves for the compost.
- Clean and put up a feeder for the birds.
(Remember, birds depend on it, so keep it stocked throughout the winter months.)
- Clean out unoccupied birdhouses so they'll be ready for early spring arrivals
- Clean and oil garden tools
- Dig up and store summer bulbs
- Make sure young transplants, especially trees and shrubs are well watered before winter freeze-up.
- Put shelters around first year evergreen transplants to protect them from winter's drying wind and sun
- Collect and store seeds for late winter or spring planting
- Consider joining a gardening club to learn more about gardening.

Hang an Autumn Wreath

Gather garlands of silver garlic and make a wreath, or create a vine with Bittersweet and baby pumpkins and ornamental squash. Dried grapevines, Indian corn, dried sunflowers and yarrow can also be colorful additions. Bring the outside in, and make another wreath as a centerpiece for your Thanksgiving table

Pumpkins for Ghosts and Goblins

Buy a few pumpkins or cornstalks and display them on your front porch, or by your fall containers. Erect a few witches or scarecrows. Neighborhood kids will await the annual rites of Halloween with glee and your garlic wreath should scare away even the most evil passing vampires.

Julianne Labreche is a member of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton and an avid gardener, all seasons of the year.