

## Native Plants Provide Fall Color and Attract Wildlife



*American beautyberry is a native shrub that has colorful purple berries in the fall. Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension:*

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November 6, 2003

As autumn approaches and the days grow shorter there is a noticeable change in the weather as well as a change in our native plants. There are many natives that have wonderful fall color in the landscape and wildlife value for our wild critters.

The golden glow of hickory, *Carya* spp, stands out the most, especially on a brilliant fall day. Squirrels and deer browse the nuts and depend on them. Hickory is also used by wood ducks and wild turkey. American beech, *Fagus Americana*, turns a soft brown in fall and retains its leaves all winter. This is a favorite roost of barred owls and the seeds a major food for flying squirrels. Although these two trees are considered slow growers, it is well worth planting a few for future generations.

Sassafras, *Sassafras albidum*, is another large growing native tree with striking red color in fall. Some sassafras tends to spread or colonize, so plant it where you don't care and enjoy. This is a great plant for the butterfly enthusiast as it is the larval food for the spicebush swallowtail butterfly.

Yaupon holly, *Ilex vomitoria*, and American holly will bring in the birds in winter. The bright red berries and glossy green foliage are a plus when other plants are leafless and dormant. Many bird species are to be found on hollies, including mockingbirds, robins, cedar waxwings, hermit thrush, and catbirds.

Elliott's blueberry, *Vaccinium Elliotti*, turns red to orange in fall and provides berries in spring for bluebirds and migratory birds. When the berries fall to the ground, box turtles, raccoons, and possums consume them. Native blueberries will grow in sun or shade. They like acid soil, so mulch with pine straw and use an azalea/camellia fertilizer.

Arching canes of purple berry clusters stand out brilliantly on *Callicarpa Americana* or American beautyberry.

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Not only do the fall migratory birds take advantage of this food, but some folks make jelly from it. The berry-laden branches are very attractive in flower arrangements, too.

Narrowleaf sunflower, *Helianthus angustifolia*, is a late fall blooming wildflower of bright yellow growing to a height of five feet. Let them go to seed and you will be entertained by the chickadees hanging upside down picking at the seeds in winter.

Sit quietly for a few minutes this fall and take notice of what activity is going on in your landscape and think about what you could plant to make it more attractive to wildlife. Fall and winter are the best times to plant trees and shrubs in our area.

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