

Fantastic Fall Foliage



*Photos by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Plant cigar flower (*Cuphea micropetala*) in a sunny spot for perennial fall color. Yellow justicia can be used in areas that receive only filtered sunlight.*

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Fall is a fantastic time of year for gardening. The heat has broken and made way for cooler days and nights in which both people and plants thrive. The fiery foliage of fall lights up gardens, roadsides, and plant nurseries this time of year. Crimsons, oranges, yellows, and burgundies can be found in trees, shrubs, grasses, and flowers. Fall is a particularly good time to plant trees, shrubs, and grasses because the plants are entering dormancy which puts less stress on them and allows better root growth now for much healthier plants in spring.

From maples to ginkgos, trees dominate the landscape with fall foliage color. The Japanese maples vary, according to cultivar, from orange to crimson, and even to deep red-wine colors. The 'Bloodgood' maple can tolerate more sun, reaching a height of 20 feet, and has foliage the color of a fine red wine. 'Crimson Queen' is a dwarf variety of Japanese maple with hot tangerine shades. Another awesome cultivar is 'Glowing Embers', named so because it resembles hot embers, with yellows, oranges, reds, and purples on the same tree. It is extremely heat tolerant and can reach 20 feet.

Ginkgo trees turn a brilliant golden yellow in the fall. They reach a mature height of 40-50 feet. Make sure to look for the 'Saratoga', 'Emperor' and 'Autumn Gold' cultivars of ginkgos because they are males. The females produce huge seed pods that are quite smelly, and so you don't want a female cultivar.

For those who prefer native trees there are many options. A phenomenal native tree is the 'Florida Flame' red maple. This is a fascinating cultivar of the native red maple that demonstrates an upright, oval shape which, with age, can reach 40-50 feet. The most remarkable aspect of this tree, though, is the sunshine gold to candy apple red fall foliage color. Later in winter it has bright red seeds. These seeds are followed by the new leaves which emerge red in early spring. Fall and spring color, what could be better? Other natives include the tulip poplars with yellows, sassafras's display of garnets and golds, and sourwood's showcase of reds to dark burgundies. Even the yaupon hollies provide radiant red berries for people and birds to enjoy.

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Fall colors can also be found in shrubs, both evergreen and deciduous, and in grasses. Loropetalums have proven to be effortless, evergreen shrubs for the landscape. All varieties have a garnet color year-round, if kept in full sun and trimmed often. In spring they have hot pink flowers. The list of deciduous shrubs includes the 'Crimson Pygmy' barberry, which speaks for itself color wise. It is a superb deciduous shrub with a free form that is just as interesting without leaves as it is with them. Watch out for the thorns, though. Some beautiful grasses include 'Bamboo' muhly and 'Adagio' miscanthus.

With a wonderful assortment of colorful plants to choose from, fall will be a fantastic color show in your garden!

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Box Ideas

Proper Planting of a Tree:

Start by digging a hole 2-3 times wider than the diameter of the root ball. The depth of the hole should be the same as the depth of the root ball. **DO NOT PLANT TOO DEEP!** Always handle the tree by the root ball, not the trunk. After planting, apply 2-4 inches of mulch as far out as the branches reach, but keep the mulch away from the trunk by at least 2 inches. Unless there is adequate rainfall, water thoroughly daily.