

Fall beauty: Color ideas to brighten your garden

by Marie Biondolillo

As summer fades slowly into fall, gardens begin to lose their luster. The trees may be fat with apples and the vines heavy with squash, but the bright blooms of summer time are rapidly becoming mere memories.

But autumn gardens can have a beauty all their own. Use early autumn as a time to refresh your garden's palette,

incorporating the rich shades of fall-blooming annuals and perennials into your flower beds.

"Fall is a great time to plant because winter rains will help make plants ready for next spring – and because sales are on," said Cheryl Greenwood Kinsley, a Master Gardener for Washington State University's Master Gardener program in Whatcom County. "Look for fall annuals that like cooler weather, like pansies, mums and violas."



Purple aster and yellow black-eyed susan flowers add color to any autumn garden. PHOTO BY CLARISSA PEARCE

Certain greens, such as kale or flowering cabbage, can also add vivacity to tired autumn gardens.

"For ornamental color, try flowering kale," said Dave Stone, an outdoors sales staff

member at the Garden Spot Nursery.

Both Kinsley and Stone recommend looking for plants that will winter well.

"What you don't want to do is buy summer-blooming annuals, like marigolds, and put them in the ground – they'll die right away," Kinsley said. "Use them for centerpieces instead."

Stone advises keeping flowers under frost and rain protection. "An awning works well if you can swing it," Stone said. "You can also plant containers and place them in a sheltered area. Because fall and winter can be so rainy, make sure that you plant in extremely well drained soil, or in raised beds."

"Look at the entire aster family, and use these to refresh containers," Kinsley said. "Black-Eyed Susans are available in some impressive new colors."

Perennials, such as blackjack sedum, make for excellent fall color as well – and unlike annuals, they'll

keep yielding returns.

"Remember that perennials cost very little right now," Kinsley said. "Even if the plant looks terrible, it could be a good investment."

Kinsley advocates for buying unimpressive-looking perennials at summer sales and using them to build beautiful fall displays for next year.

"On-sale perennials might look puny right now, but check out their roots. They should look healthy, moist, and pliable instead of brittle," Kinsley said. "If the roots look good, plant it in prepared soil, nurture it, and you'll have a fabulous plant next year."

She also recommends that gardeners choose plants based on what works in their particular microclimate, rather than picking flowers that may not flourish under Northwest conditions.

"Walk around your neighborhood and see what looks really good. See what grows without much work," Kinsley said. "A



Blackjack sedum and dwarf plumbago offer purple and pink tones, and various textures. PHOTOS BY CLARISSA PEARCE

plant's viability depends on many variables--soil quality, humidity, sun exposure. Talk to local garden centers, and form relationships with their staff."

You can add additional color by bringing vivid shrubs, delicately textured grasses, and deciduous bushes into your beds and borders.

Dwarf plumbago, Japanese maples and golden barberry can contribute brilliant hues to fall gardens, Kinsley said. Stone suggests using Russian sage, sumac, burning bush, Virginia creeper and Boston ivy. For garden color that will last well into January and February, Stone recommends planting sarcococca, heather and pink dawn viburnum.

"Grasses can be planted all year as well, and some are

evergreen," Stone said. Some of his favorites are Japanese forest grass, black mondo grass, Japanese blood grass, blue sedge and juncus.

You can also use late summer garden sales as an opportunity to pick up spring bulbs on the cheap. Autumn-blooming bulbs, while not available at sale prices right now, can inject cheer into dull autumn flower beds.

"It's color that nobody expects," Kinsley said. "Plant them now with your kids--you'll have flowers in a couple weeks."

Marie Biondolillo, of Bellingham, writes about food and pop culture for YouAreWeAre.com. She also blogs about entertainment news for WeekinRewind.com.

Indoor decorating: Fall flower arrangements

When decorating indoors, you can utilize a mix of annual, perennials, foliage, grasses and bulb flowers as well. Try combining unexpected elements, such as rosehips and berries, with standard cut flowers.

"Snowberries can be used with flowers, or early holly berries," said Gretchen Hoyt, co-owner of Alm Hill Gardens in Everson. "Oregon grape has a nice purple-blue tone, and late grapes work well for draping."

Hoyt likes to use chrysanthemums and dahlias in her fall flower arrangements. She recommends mixing them with maple leaves, turning blueberry leaves, and yellow aspen leaves.

"To preserve leaves for flower arrangements, put them between layers of wax paper and press them with an iron--it'll keep them flexible," Hoyt said.

Later into fall, as flowers become less available, Hoyt advocates for using flowers that dry easily, such as strawflowers and lavender.

"Onion flowers and other aliums produce large, spiky round flowers that dry well," Hoyt said. "We sometimes make wreaths from purple thistle flowers, small gourds, and Chinese lanterns." Moundings of late fall gourds, fruits and vegetables can also make for beautiful centerpieces. If you want to mix flowers with these materials, Hoyt recommends planting them in an "oasis," a piece of wet floral foam in a waterproof container.

"I've sometimes cut a pumpkin in half, put an oasis in it, and filled it with chrysanthemums and Majesty millet," Hoyt said. "For a festive touch, you can spray it with sparkling silver floral spray."

Wreaths made from late peppers can also add a dash of welcome color, Hoyt said.



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