

## **Foliage Colors Add Punch to the Landscape**

by Kelly Fial

Erie County Master Gardener

Daffodils are up, ornamental trees are blooming, and the grass is certainly greener! While we pull out that lawnmower for the first mow of the season, we may notice some spaces in our landscape that need some attention. Perhaps a bush we gave “one last chance” to just didn’t make it. Maybe a lily or hosta has overgrown its boundaries and needs divided or removed. This is a great opportunity to tidy up and rejuvenate our yards.

A common thought is, “I want to see more color.” Many homeowners are moving away from planting annuals which need frequent watering and are choosing perennials that are less maintenance. This does not mean we have to lose out on color; we can incorporate more color through the foliage of the plants. We can investigate the plant tag or an online description to find out the blossom color, berries, bark, texture, and leaf color of the plant.

Trees are a big purchase and can add considerable color to the overall visual appeal of your property. Take into consideration how a new tree will blend with the siding or brick color of your home, traffic patterns, and the surrounding landscape. Ornamental trees are intended to serve as an accent in the landscape and will be noticed when in close proximity to a home. Keep mature growth in mind to prevent “crowding” near a house.

Ornamental trees provide a beautiful backdrop for smaller perennials. Dogwoods, crabapple, and crab cherry have a natural, lateral branching habit, and display red, white, or pink blooms. Redbud trees have an upright habit and are filled with purple blossoms before the heart-shaped leaves appear. Magnolias have magnificent large blossoms that are visible from a distance. Kousa dogwoods add special interest with pointed flower petals, while the Cornelian cherry dogwood blooms early, with brilliant yellow blossoms. All these trees have leaves which turn shades of yellow, gold, red, and bronze in fall. Purple-leaf sand cherry has pink blooms and a dense, maroon-purple canopy of leaves.

Larger deciduous trees such as red maple, silver maple, ginkgo, curly willow, coral bark willow, and quaking aspen all have interesting branching habits and produce brilliant, warm colors in fall. White birch and river birch trees have stunning bark color and texture. Quaking aspen and willow trees provide “movement” in the landscape. As the leaves and branches wave and turn in the breeze, they display a silvery, reflective quality as they move.

Evergreen bushes and trees can serve as nice “anchor plants” in the landscape, providing constant color. Juniper, cedar, yew, holly, spruce, pine, false cypress, and others are available in colors such as lime green, steel blue, green with a rust-bronze cast, and dark blue-green. Combining a few yellow Mop cypress with a steel blue Albiqua Drinking Gourd Hosta will look nice rounding the corner of a house, accompanied by a few peach daylilies.

Some bushes are most stunning in the winter, such as red twig dogwood, yellow twig dogwood, and tartarian dogwood. The bushes display bright branches in winter, contrasting nicely with the snow. White blossoms and berries, as well as the red leaf color in the fall, will catch your eye. Ornamental elderberry is a beautiful bush available in vertical or mounded habit, with lemon-lime or purple-black finely cut leaves and delicate blooms. Although not a bush, Japanese maple trees come in countless shades which change throughout the seasons and have impressive deeply-cut leaves. A Golden Japanese Spikenard (Aralia) will look stunning next to a blue spruce or weeping white spruce! Buttonbush is another great bush with texture—and, it's a native! For more information on natives, check out this site: <https://bygl.osu.edu/index.php/node/1856>.

Dappled willow can be a tree or bush, with narrow green leaves which graduate to white and pink at the ends of the dark red branches. It makes a beautiful statement, paired with perennials with red coloring. Caryopteris has leaves of gray-green or lime green, blooming from late summer through fall, with blue flowers extending the length of the branches. Roses are known for the multitude of bloom colors, and some have striking dark foliage graduating from deep green to maroon-red. Viburnum are a nice alternative to hydrangeas, with flat-shaped clusters of delicate pink or white flowers, some with a wonderful fragrance. Leaves can turn maroon-red in fall, the berries are pink and blue, or red. Ninebark, spirea, and barberry range in color from deep maroon-red to lime green, and have a rounded, or mounded habit. Wintercreeper is a small shrub providing that “flash” of green and white (or gold and green) which gets your attention in the landscape.

Perennials provide endless choices for placing color where you need it. Bearded Zebra Iris has white and green striped leaves which are stunning mixed with darker leaved plants. Heuchera (coral bells) stand out due to the array of colors available, including lime, red, maroon, purple-black, silver-green, and several tones of bright purple and apricot. The flowers are delicate and bloom above the mounded splash of foliage color. Asiatic lilies bring a bright patch of color after spring bulbs fade, and martagon lilies bring vertical interest (reaching up to 72”). Daylilies provide narrow green strap-like foliage, topped with many beautiful bloom colors. Ornamental grasses provide subtle color, height, and movement, and the plumes provide fall color and texture. Ferns even join the party, available in bronze, deep green, lime, and silvery green. Japanese painted fern is a delicate addition to a partly-shaded area. Mums ensure bright color masses in many rich tones right up until frost. This wide variety of plant colors makes choosing new selections at the nursery like opening a new box of crayons!

#### Upcoming Master Gardener events:

April 20 - Earth Day at Osborn Park; check out our booth.

May 11 - Plant Sale, Erie County Fairgrounds, 9:00am-noon.

September - Want to be a Master Gardener? Call 419-627-7631 for class info.