

# Seattle Post-Intelligencer

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## NW Gardens: Wake up sleepy fall beds

These 10 plants relish autumn

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By MARTY WINGATE  
SPECIAL TO THE P-I

Autumn has its own charms in the garden. Fall doesn't mark an end to the displays, if you choose plants with a variety of ornamental characteristics, including foliage, color and -- yes -- flowers.

Here are suggestions to help your garden sail through autumn (or the first hard freeze, whichever comes first). Make sure to choose these or other plants in these categories, and you'll be sure to have a garden that stands out even as the days get shorter.

Evergreen is always in style; it offers a year-round presence and usually gives you a break in the maintenance department. Try these out as garden denizens that work well in autumn, as well as other seasons:

Japanese holly (*Ilex crenata*) is so dependable as to be almost overlooked, but it would be greatly missed if it disappeared. The small, matte green leaves provide a fine texture, and its many cultivars are useful in almost any design situations.

'Mariesii' has oddly congested foliage on an upright plant. It looks great as a small specimen among flowering plants in all seasons, and it often is a bonsai subject.

'Northern Beauty' grows into a pleasantly rounded shape and has shiny leaves. The leaves of 'Convexa' -- a fine substitute for boxwood as a low, trimmed hedge -- are curved under just slightly.

*Muehlenbeckia* (wire vine) used to be a basket stuffer, but gardeners are discovering it serves well as a ground cover or single mound of interest.

Its stems are thin and look like a bunch of wire that you've crumpled up. Small, glossy green leaves abound. It stays looking neat and tidy no matter what the season and takes full sun to part shade without breaking stride.

In late spring, wire vine might be your solution to hiding bulb foliage -- not those big, floppy tulip leaves, but certain daffodils and definitely crocus. All year, autumn included, it provides a complicated, visually fascinating note.

*Loropetalum chinense* and its various cultivars are deciduous in colder climates but can take a normal maritime Pacific Northwest fall and winter. *Loropetalum* is called the fringe flower, because of its strappy flowers -- white, pink or bright magenta, depending on the cultivar you have -- that appear in abundance in spring and occasionally throughout the rest of the year.

The flowers are lovely, but in fall it's the green or purple leaves on arching branches that make the 4- to 5-foot shrub a valuable component of the garden, either in the ground or in a pot. *Loropetalum* is a member of the witch hazel family, although it doesn't give off the fragrance that those winter-blooming shrubs do.

Try 'Firedance' or 'Purple Majesty,' which have red-purple leaves, or 'Razzleberri,' which begins burgundy and ages to



 zoom

The nurseries are filled with chrysanthemums, with good reason. The bold blooms are a natural for fall. (MARTY WINGATE)

olive green.

The smoke bush (*Cotinus*) is a good way to incorporate fall color. It's a vital part of the mixed border throughout summer, and it continues to deliver the goods in autumn when it takes on hot orange and scarlet hues.

This looks fabulous on both the green-leaved kind, such as *Cotinus* 'Pink Champagne,' and the purple-leaved varieties, such as 'Grace.' Smoke bushes leaf out late in spring, making you wonder if they'll ever start growing, but they color up late in the fall, helping to extend the autumn show.

You don't have a Japanese maple in your garden? You're in luck -- October and November are great months to select an *Acer palmatum* for your garden, because you can see the tree's fall color. Seedling Japanese maples are available at just about any nursery, and they are less expensive than named cultivars. Because their genes are a result of fruit-basket mix-up, you don't know how intense the fall color will be until you see it.



Mukdenia 'Crimson Fans' has good color for shade. (TERRANOVA NURSERIES)

If you want to be almost sure of a foliar show, go for a named cultivar, such as 'Shishigashira' -- the lion's mane or lion's head maple. It holds off turning golden orange until well into November.

*Mukdenia rossii* 'Crimson Fans' is an uncommon perennial with good color for shade. It reddens up in summer, but the color lasts through autumn. Plant it with heucheras and green ground covers such as *Epimedium*.

Flowers are still an option for the fall garden, including the tried and true.

The grocery-store shelves and nursery tables are filled with big, blooming chrysanthemums -- with good reason. They come in autumnal colors of warm purple, rusty red, golden yellow and are a perfect accompaniment to a collection of dried but vibrant leaves -- a quick porch or table arrangement.

But can you keep them for next year? Maybe.

These plants are put on the fast track to provide autumn color and not necessarily grown with an eye toward years of enjoyment. But still, you could plant them out after they finish flowering (those that you keep in the house for some fall color probably won't make it).

Chrysanthemums have two things going against them: They leaf out late, so it's easy to forget that they are even in the garden -- until in April, when you begin digging a hole for a new plant. Oops.

Also, they want to bloom earlier than they should. Who wants chrysanthemums flowering in the garden in June? To make sure they will give you that autumn touch, pinch them back twice during the growing season -- on Mother's Day and July Fourth (that's an easy way to remember). That will give you bushier plants and hold off flowering until you need it.

Sweet little pansy faces are everywhere, too. But too many of them are large-flowered varieties, and the flowers are so heavy they can barely hold their heads up. Much better is to select a small variety, such as those in the Sorbet series (pastel shades) or golden 'Tiger Eyes.'

Buy 4-inch pots that already have flowers on them; they are available throughout fall and winter. They won't put on a lot of new growth (hence the necessity of buying plants already in flower), but will look cheerful and then go to town next spring.

If or when a freeze comes this winter, your pansies will look dead as a doornail. Pay them no mind, and they will perk up when the temperature gets above freezing.

It's inevitable that someone will notice the evergreen plant with yellow daisy flowers blooming through fall and winter

in pots around town. It's *Euryops*, a South African native. It's often found as standards -- the plants look like little flower trees on a trunk.

*Euryops* blooms best in a protected area -- up close to the house -- and in full sun. Unless we get a hard freeze, you can expect it to last well into winter.

The African daisies (*Osteospermum*) continue to flower and by now are large, round shrubby-looking plants about 2 to 3 feet high and wide. They just might overwinter, but even if they don't make it, the long blooming season makes them must-have annuals.

Flower colors include cream ('Buttermilk'), purple ('Sunny Sonja'), orange and yellow ('Orange Symphony'; 'Lemon Symphony'); many have a blue or purple-blue center, which adds an intriguing appearance to the daisy flowers.

You could make a whole garden out of these 10 plants, a garden that would look good for more than one season, but certainly a garden that would shine through autumn.

## 10 for fall

Japanese holly (*Ilex crenata*)

wire vine (*Muehlenbeckia*)

*Loropetalum chinense*

smoke bush (*Cotinus*)

Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*)

*Mukdenia rossii*

Chrysanthemum

Pansy

*Euryops*

African daisy (*Osteospermum*)

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*Marty Wingate, a Seattle-based Master Gardener, has a master's degree in urban horticulture and is the author of two garden books. She can be contacted at: [martywin@earthlink.net](mailto:martywin@earthlink.net).*

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