

Know Which Trees Give Best Autumn Color

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Dec. 1, 2018

Q: I would like to plant a landscape tree for fall color. Do you have a recommendation of one that will do well here in the Redding area?

A: Every fall we hear about the East Coast and the thousands of leaf peepers traveling to see the amazing fall colors as nature puts on its annual show.



Add fall color to your garden with a Liquidamber tree (yellow) and Japanese Maple. (Photo: Contributed photo)

We don't need to travel all that way. We have some spectacular fall color right here in our backyards.

Unlike the fall color back East, many of the trees we see around town with brilliant red and gold colors are not native. They were introduced to our area because they make good shade trees and have bright fall colors.

According to former Sunset Magazine editor Bill Marken, in his article, "Top five trees for fall color in California," there are five trees that can be counted on for reliable fall color even in our mild fall climate. His list includes:

- Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*): This tree has brilliant yellow fall colors and it on many of the plant expert's list for the best fall color. One word of warning about female ginkgo trees. They can be messy because they drop a lot of debris and stinky fruit, so you should be sure to choose a male tree of a labeled variety, such as Autumn Gold, or Saratoga when shopping.
- Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*): This tree produces bright red and orange fall color. These trees need protection from the afternoon sun in Redding to look their best. Chinese pistache, pistacia chinensis, for the most spectacular show of red, electric orange and pink leaves in the fall. This tree is also the most reliable for fall color even in years when other trees don't have the best showing.
- Sweetgum, also known as Liquidamber (*Liquidambar styraciflua*): This tree has beautifully shaped leaves with fall colors that range from dark deep red to yellow and pink. These trees are a very drought tolerant, but don't always have the best structure; and they can be very messy, producing many hard spiky fruits.
- Japanese persimmon (*Diospyros kaki*): This is a small tree with spectacular red and orange fall foliage that has the bonus of edible orange fruit that decorate the bare branches into winter.

In addition to ginkgo and Chinese pistache trees, the Sacramento Tree Foundation recommends:

- Tupelo, or Sourgum (*Nyssa sylvatica*): This tree has bright red fall color and the ability to grow in heavy clay soils.

- Scarlet oak (*Quercus coccinea*) This tree offers intense red color in the fall, and then leaves turn brown and stay on the tree all winter. I don't find the marcescent leaves, dead leaves that stay on the tree, very attractive, but some folks do. The Scarlet oak is a large nicely-shaped, moderately-fast-growing shade tree.

Other fall foliage favorites of mine are Florida Dogwoods, Red Maples, Northern Red Oak and Smoke trees. I would recommend that you select plants for seasonal color now, so you can see their colors and choose what appeals most to you.

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.