

Fiery Fall Color

TEN PLANTS THAT PUT ON A COLOR SHOW

BY PETER FABRIS

FALL SPARKLES WITH COLOR ACROSS THE LONE STAR STATE, AND IT'S a great time to add new plants to your yard to further brighten the autumn show. "In most of the state, it's the best time to establish new plantings," says Tom LeRoy, Montgomery County extension agent, horticulture, for the Texas AgriLife Extension Service.

Plants that get acclimated to new surroundings in the fall can better withstand the stress of a hot Texas summer than those that are planted in spring.

Texas boasts quite a few native plants that strut their stuff in autumn. LeRoy and Andrea DeLong-Amaya, horticulture director at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin, shared some of their favorites with *Texas Heritage for Living*®.

Trees

Texas red oak (*Quercus buckleyi*) is drought-resistant and offers beautiful brick-red fall foliage, usually after Thanksgiving. "It holds its leaves longer than most plants," DeLong-Amaya says.

Cedar elm (*Ulmus crassifolia*) has a rounded crown of drooping branches and the smallest leaves of any native elm. "People don't necessarily think of it for fall color," DeLong-Amaya says, "but it has nice yellow foliage, and it does well in a huge range of conditions."

Drummond's maple (*Acer rubrum* var. *Drummondii*) is well suited to the acidic soil of East Texas, and this species provides vibrant fall foliage. This tree won't work statewide, though. "It would have a terrible time in Central Texas with the alkaline soils," LeRoy warns.

Shrubs

Rusty blackhaw viburnum (*Viburnum rufidulum*) is a native shrub that grows to 18 feet high. "It's a really neat, loose large shrub with bronze/burgundy fall color," LeRoy says.

Fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*) provides brilliant orange and red foliage and tends to stay put more than flameleaf sumac, not forming thickets.

Perennials

Shrubby boneset, aka Mistflower or Havana snakeroot (*Ageratina havanensis*), usually blooms in October and grows to four feet tall. "A wonderful butterfly plant," DeLong-Amaya says.

Fall aster (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*) has blue/purple blooms and grows well in light shade or full sun. "The stems can get top-heavy, so it's best to trim them lightly several times during the growing season to get a fluffy, bushy appearance," DeLong-Amaya advises.

Goldenrod has an unfair reputation. It blooms during ragweed season, so

many have mistakenly blamed their hay fever on this handsome yellow flower. The Prairie goldenrod (*Solidago nemoralis*) is a shorter-growing member of the goldenrod family. "It doesn't sucker like its taller cousins, so it's more manageable in a garden," DeLong-Amaya points out.

Grasses

"Grasses are an under-used garden choice, offering contrasting textural forms with many offering standout fall blooms," DeLong-Amaya says.

Gulf muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) is an ornamental grass that grows well away from its native Gulf Coast area habitat. The two- to three-foot-tall plant blooms in October with a red-pinkish hue resembling a cloud of mist.

Big muhly (*Muhlenbergia Lindheimeri*) has a fountain-like appearance. This two- to five-foot-tall Gulf muhly cousin has a soft-textured silvery bloom in the fall. ★

Peter Fabris is a gardening expert and freelance writer.

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Texas Red Oak

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