

# THE OUTSIDER

Illinois Extension Horticulture serving Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark



## FALLING FOR TREES: SPECIES WITH RED AUTUMN COLOR

Autumn is a season of transition. Annual plants are completing their life cycle and perennial plants are preparing for winter. Kids are going back to school, fall sports are beginning, and swimsuits are traded for sweaters. And, perhaps, it is during this season more than any other that plants and people come together to celebrate. For many, apple picking, pumpkin patches, and leaf-peeping are autumn traditions. Fall is also a good time to assess the landscape and plant trees.

If the bold colors of autumn inspire you to plant a tree, here are a few species that will provide bold hues of red each year.

### ***Nyssa sylvatica***

Common Name(s): Black gum, Tupelo, Sour gum, Black tupelo

A medium sized tree reaching heights of 50 to 60 feet, *Nyssa sylvatica* keeps a uniform pyramidal shape during youth. As the tree ages, a more irregular form emerges. Branches grow perpendicular to the trunk and host clean, glossy leaves during the summer. In autumn, glossy green leaves of summer consistently transform into bright red leaves.

Tupelo is a tough tree, tolerant of urban pollution, drought conditions, heat, and salt. Tupelo has a unique tap root structure that makes transplant difficult. When possible, plant trees at a small stage, preferably balled and burlapped in fall or early spring to optimize root system preservation. Very few pests or diseases plague Tupelo, leaf spots are the most common ailment.



Photo by Phil Cray, Master Gardener



## Cornus florida

Common Name: Flowering Dogwood

A small to medium sized tree, Flowering Dogwood offers an outsized amount of appeal. In early spring, large, showy bracts of white, pink, or red appear around small white flowers. As modified leaves rather than petals on the flowers, bracts linger on the tree for an extended period of time. Green summer leaves complement the landscape until they demand attention in the autumn with a display of bold hues of red and orange in September and October.

Flowering Dogwood does best in rich, moist, well-drained soils on sites with full sun to part shade. Tolerant of walnut toxicity, flowering dogwood are prone to a variety of plant diseases, especially when stressed. Anthracnose is the most threatening disease, others include powdery mildew, leaf spot, root rot, canker, leaf and twig blight, and borers. Many cultivars are available, and many offer some tolerance or resistance to the previously mentioned ailments.



Spring blooms



Fall colors

## Amelanchier arborea

Common Name(s): Downy Serviceberry

Native to the eastern United States, Serviceberry is a medium sized tree that provides four seasons of interest. Smooth grey bark is ornamental and grabs your eyes in the dormant landscape of winter. Fragrant, white flowers emerge on bare branches in early spring. Green leaves give backdrop to berries of red to dark purple in the summer and autumn transforms foliage into a rainbow of colors from yellow to rusty orange to deep red. Downy serviceberry is one of the first trees to offer autumn foliage color. In a diverse landscape, this early fall color can provide a visual bridge from late summer to autumn.

Serviceberry is well-suited for a variety of site conditions. Tolerant of pollution, clay soils, periods of limited moisture, and full sun to part shade, Serviceberry is suitable for many types of landscapes. A variety of cultivars are available and are denoted as *Amelanchier x grandifolia*. This indicates a hybridization between *A. arborea* and *A. laevis*.



Spring blooms



Fall colors



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## MORE THAN A TREE

These are just a few of the many species options available to homeowners and communities looking to add a pop of red to the autumn landscape. As exciting as planting trees can be, remember that there are additional criteria to consider when selecting a species. Right tree, right place is a simplified way of saying species choice needs to be based on a multitude of factors including existing site conditions, species requirements, species growth habit, landowner's goals, and preferred aesthetics. Site considerations also account for the diversity of species in the surrounding landscape.

Choosing to plant tree species not already represented on or near a site is beneficial from an environmental and aesthetic perspective. Resources are available through University of Illinois Extension to help when selecting a tree species to plant. Contact your local Extension office for assistance.



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## OUTSIDER ACTION

Try these activities to be more of an Outsider

- Learn more about the why and how of tree planting in this webinar recording:  
[go.illinois.edu/TreePlantingYouTube](https://go.illinois.edu/TreePlantingYouTube)
- Get outside for a tree walk, pay attention to those species that exhibit bold colors this fall.

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