

## Home/Garden

# Mother Nature paints another pretty picture

Flaming hillsides of maple are a New England cliché, but the reality is much richer than any cliché can express. Certainly the maples blaze scarlet, but the hills are also painted with the yellows and golds of willow, ash, locust and birch, the melon orange of the sassafras and the bronze of the beech.

The dirt road I live on meanders for a mile and a half through the woods. In the autumn I feel this is a jewelled corridor worthy of the most opulent oriental potentate. The dying ferns are a wainscoting of beaten gold and bronze; underfoot a many-colored carpet of leaves. At the main road I emerge into a rotunda, the dome a cerulean blue, crystal air shot with golden sun and distant walls hung with rich tapestries in every shade of russet, vermillion, madder and gold.

My house may be tumbling down, but here on the hill I'm at least as rich as Croesus.

When you choose trees for your domestic landscape, choose those that will not only give you green and cooling shade in the summer, but a jewelled richness in the fall. We live in New England and cannot ignore the maple, but we cannot speak of "the maple" as though there were only one, and that one turning only a single shade of red.

The Red-Silver maple *Acer x freemanii* tolerates wet soils and drought even better than the red or swamp maple. The fall color is spectacular ranging through yellow and orange with strong red accents.

Another maple that is hardy, tolerates a wide range of heavy or sandy soils and provides special interest every season of the year, is the amur maple *Acer ginnala*. New growth in the spring has a reddish tinge and it even has fragrant flowers. In

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Between The Rows

summer it produces winged fruits that are usually edged with red or pink, and then it turns every shade of red and yellow in the fall. The color will vary with the weather, more yellow after cloudy days and warm nights, and more red after warm days and cold nights.

The swamp, or red maple is a perfect yard tree with a well-shaped canopy that is not so dense as to discourage grass in the lawn. This tree is known for its red fall color.

While not found naturally in our landscape, the Japanese maple adds a striking note in our yards with that deep wine red that lasts all growing season. It's not as tolerant of poor soil conditions or drought as the other maples, but it's worth preparing for.

The American beech *Fagus grandifolia* turns a rich gold in fall, usually at the same time the swamp maple is turning scarlet — a magnificent sight. However, it's not as good for residential use, because it creates such dense shade. But if you have a natural area this is a handsome tree.

The blue beech, or American hornbeam, *Cornus carolina* grows to a height of 40 feet and has beautiful leaves that are unusual in every sea-

son. When they unfold in the spring they are slightly red, turn blue green as they mature and in the fall they turn a vivid red orange, but may also be combinations of yellow, gold and even purplish. The blue beech is not only beautiful, it's tolerant of severe cold and wind and adapts to many soils.

The paper birch *Betula papyrifera* is a beautiful accent in the yard because of its handsome bark — and in the fall because of its clear yellow color.

Native dogwoods have been suffering from a blight recently, so more attention is being paid to the Chinese dogwoods *Cornus kousa*, which are resistant to the problem. Milky Way is one variety that blooms after the leaves are out in May and June. In the fall the foliage turns shades of red and it produces large red fruits that provide interest into the winter.

There is also the new hybrid, *Cornus florida* Cherokee Sunset, a medium-sized dogwood with variegated foliage, light and dark green tinged with pink. It is a strong grower with good resistance to anthracnose disease. In addition to all this the flowers are red, not merely pink. Then in the fall the foliage turns many shades of red and deep green.

Another hybrid, Cherokee Daybreak, produces white flowers and paler leaves that have margins of creamy white. In the fall those margins turn rosy shades of pink and red.

Trees are one of the most important parts of our gardens and yards, so don't be limited by the obvious choices. Do a little shopping and like Ali Baba who discovered the magic phrase,

"Open, Sesame," all the riches of the East will be yours.

