

# Stillingfleet

As the gardener's year draws to a close, Vanessa Cook of Stillingfleet recommends the trees which will provide colour and interest throughout the autumn

I love the autumn. We closed the garden at the end of September and I now have time to make changes and plan for next year. It is also the time to appreciate the colours on trees and shrubs as well as the berries and fruit decorating many of them.

October through to early March is the ideal time to plant trees and shrubs. Many of the more interesting varieties can only be bought from specialist nurseries and in the north we often have to use mail order from specialists in the south. This month I want to encourage everyone to plant a tree or shrub in your garden. Here I write about trees that are especially interesting in autumn, and as I know many gardens these days are small I will suggest several upright or fastigate trees suitable for those smaller spaces.

One of the best small spreading trees with fiery red autumn colour is *Acer palmatum* 'osakazuki'. I cannot grow Japanese maples here (we are too windy) but they do well in large tubs with lime-free compost so are ideal for smaller gardens where they are protected, and the pretty foliage looks good all year. *Acer campestre* is grown throughout the country, in hedges or in field boundaries, and there is a new variety called *A. campestre* 'evenley red' which was discovered in Northamptonshire and has especially good autumn colour. Both these are large trees but fastigated forms of many trees are now being developed. *A. campestre* 'William Caldwell' is one of these. These are British natives and are therefore very useful in the garden as hosts to many native insects which in turn feed our garden birds. The snake bark maples are small trees and not only have excellent autumn foliage but the added attraction of interesting bark which will give pleasure through out the summer and winter. *Acer capillipes* 'Antoine' has vertical striations of grey-green, while *Acer davidii* 'Rosalie' has silver and red striped bark – both have golden autumn colour and are slow growing. While talking about bark I must mention *Acer griseum*. Mine was about 90cm when I planted it 30 years ago and it is now a small tree with wonderful, peeling cinnamon-coloured bark which, when the winter sun catches it, lights up the whole area. Under planted with snowdrops it is a delight in January and February. A more difficult but striking small tree is *Acer x conspicuum* 'phoenix'. This has startling lipstick-red stems. Unfortunately I had not realised that it hated winter wet and planted it near our pond. I thought it would look wonderful reflected in the water – sadly it died the first winter! However I have ordered it again and will be much more careful where I plant it. Do look out

for any of the snakebark maples as they make ideal small trees and usually have good autumn colour and bark which makes you want to stroke them as you pass by.

All the birch trees have good, usually golden, autumn colour and again have the added attraction of interesting tactile bark. *Betula* 'Grayswood Hill' is one of my favourites. The bark is very pale, creamy with a wash of pink, almost luminescent in winter light, and velvety to touch. Mine is now eight years old and is still small but the bark improves year by year.

*Cercidiphyllum japonicum* is interesting in that it has wonderful orange and red autumn colours but also scents the surrounding space with burnt sugar (or some people think it smells of candy floss). We grow *C. japonicum* 'Boyd's dwarf' which is a slow growing small tree with an elegant rounded head.

Many gardens have *Amelanchier lamarckii*, with its pretty showy white flowers in spring, bronze tipped foliage during the summer followed by excellent orange and red in the autumn. It also has small red berries which are quickly eaten by the birds. If you don't have room for this wide-spreading tree, and nothing looks worse that having to prune a tree to contain it, try *Amelanchier alnifolia* 'obelisk', I planted this last year and am waiting to see how the foliage develops this autumn.

In the autumn we not only look forward to the changing leaf colour but also to the numerous berries and fruits. All the varieties of *Malus* have eye-catching fruit and several have autumn colour as well. Two of the best are *Malus* 'golden hornet' with large yellow crab apples, and *Malus* 'John Downie' which has red-flushed crabs. Both have fruit large enough to use for crab apple jelly and can be pruned hard in winter to restrict their size. I planted *Malus x evereste* last year to help soften the new greenhouse and it had very pretty pink buds followed by white flowers and now has a few small orange fruits and the foliage is turning golden, so I think it will be a great addition to the garden. The *Malus* with the best autumn colour is *Malus tschonoskii* – it is a good upright form of crab with white blossom, silver-white foliage in the spring and startlingly red leaf colour in the autumn, again the greenish crabs are decorative rather than culinary.

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