

Trees and Shrubs for Fall Colour

OVERVIEW

Fall is one of BC's most beautiful garden seasons. The right trees and shrubs transform the garden into a tapestry of red, orange, burgundy, and gold. Many of these plants also offer spring flowers, summer interest, or winter berries, making them exceptional four-season investments. The following selections are proven performers for BC's South Coast and Penticton.

TREES FOR FALL COLOUR - TOP TREES FOR AUTUMN IMPACT

Fullmoon Maple

Acer japonicum

- Rich crimson fall colour; 'Aconitifolium' is outstanding
- Small tree or large shrub: 6-10 m at maturity
- Ideal for urban and small gardens
- Moist, well-drained site; part shade to full sun

Japanese Maple

Acer palmatum

- Fall shades of red, orange, or gold depending on variety
- 'Bloodgood': deep reddish-purple summer leaves turn brilliant red in fall
- 'Sango-kaku' (coral-bark): apricot-yellow fall colour; salmon-pink bark for winter interest
- Mature height 6-7.5 m; 'Dissectum' forms stay smaller with fine, lacey leaves

Maidenhair Tree

Ginkgo biloba

- Butter-yellow fall colour; fan-shaped leaves are iconic
- Large tree reaching 30 m; needs space and a large garden
- Choose male varieties to avoid odorous fruit
- Long-lived; truly majestic at maturity

Sweetgum

Liquidambar styraciflua

- Spectacular fall colour: dark burgundy through brilliant red and yellow
- Large, maple-like leaves; distinctive grooved bark for winter interest
- Reaches 12 m at maturity; needs a spacious site
- Full sun for best colour development

Katsura

Cercidiphyllum japonicum

- Rich reddish-burgundy fall colour; leaves smell of caramel when falling
- Narrow growth habit takes less space than other large trees
- Bronze hints throughout summer; excellent shade tree
- Reaches 12 m; 'Pendula' weeping form also available

Persian Parrotia

Parrotia persica

- Stunning inner-glow fall colour described as one of the finest of any tree
- Small tree: reaches about 5 m; excellent for urban gardens
- Attractive peeling bark for year-round interest
- Reliable and low-maintenance once established

SHRUBS FOR FALL COLOUR - TOP SHRUBS FOR AUTUMN IMPACT

Winged Euonymus (Burning Bush)

Euonymus alatus

- Arguably the brightest red fall colour of any shrub; visible from a great distance
- Grows 1.8-2.4 m tall with a wide canopy
- Full sun for the most intense colour
- Compact forms available for smaller spaces

GARDENWORKS

Trees and Shrubs for Fall Colour

Beautyberry

Callicarpa bodinieri var. *Giraldii*

- Rose-purple fall foliage plus spectacular jewel-like lavender berries
- Plant in groups of three for the heaviest fruiting
- Reaches 2 m tall and wide at maturity
- Understated in summer; showstopping in autumn

Red Twig Dogwood

Cornus stolonifera

- Brilliant fall foliage colour plus vivid red winter stems
- Variegated-leaf forms add summer contrast
- Yellow-twig variety for a different winter display
- Cut to 15 cm in late winter to promote fresh, brightly coloured stems

Doublefile Viburnum

Viburnum tomentosum

- Warm bronze fall foliage; horizontal tiered branching
- White blooms in spring along the full length of every branch
- 'Summer Snowflake' is the most popular cultivar: 1.5-1.8 m
- Elegant four-season structure

Dwarf Fothergilla

Fothergilla spp.

- Rich burgundy-red fall colour; white catkin-like flowers in early spring
- *F. monticola*: compact, 1-1.5 m; *F. major*: more upright to 3 m
- Full sun produces the best fall colour; slow-growing
- Excellent in acidic, moist, well-drained soil

Staghorn Sumac

Rhus typhina

- Breathtaking orange and yellow fall display
- Spreads via suckers: give it space and monitor spread
- Small tree habit reaching 7.5-9 m
- Dramatic velvety stems are ornamental through winter

Heavenly Bamboo

Nandina domestica

- Evergreen shrub with intense fall and winter colour in full sun
- Tolerates full shade to full sun; colour most vivid in sun
- Reaches 1.5-1.8 m; works as informal unstructured hedge
- Red berries add further winter interest

CLIMBERS FOR FALL COLOUR

Virginia Creeper

Parthenocissus quinquefolia

Self-clinging to any surface; rich orange to deep burgundy fall colour. Tolerates shade to full sun. Excellent for walls and fences.

Firethorn

Pyracantha spp.

Evergreen with abundant orange-red berries in autumn. Fast-growing; use as barrier or wall shrub. Reaches over 3 m unpruned.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is my Japanese maple not colouring well in fall?

Intense fall colour requires cool nights and mild sunny days in autumn. Years with warm, wet autumns produce less vivid colour. Maples in too much shade also colour less reliably. For the best results, site Japanese maples where they receive morning sun and are sheltered from harsh afternoon heat.

When is the best time to plant trees and shrubs for fall colour?

Both spring (March-April) and fall (September-October) are excellent planting times on the BC South Coast. Fall planting allows roots to establish through the mild, moist winter before facing summer heat. Spring planting gives the tree a full growing season to establish before its first winter.

Which of these plants are best for Penticton?

Japanese maples, Katsura, Parrotia, Fothergilla, Viburnum, and Enkianthus all perform well in Penticton with appropriate watering through summer. Sweetgum and Ginkgo also grow well given adequate space. Focus on moist, well-drained sites and ensure supplemental irrigation through the dry Okanagan summer. Burning Bush (*Euonymus alatus*) is also a reliable and spectacular choice for Penticton.