



GARDEN NOTES

ADDING COLOR TO THE LANDSCAPE

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It is called the “green industry,” but an all-green landscape can be monotonous.

Other than green, the easiest color to bring into the landscape is purple or red, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. The most popular purple-leafed plants by far are the flowering plums. They tend to be over-planted in northern Utah but they are a pleasant addition.

Most flowering plums have white flowers in the spring and deep, purple foliage throughout the summer, he says. Although hardy for our area, severe cold winter temperatures can cause many of these trees to suffer some dieback or even complete death. They tend to be a short-lived tree anyway, meaning that most of them begin to decline after 15 to 20 years.

The most popular flowering plum variety is probably the Thundercloud, Goodspeed says. Other tree varieties include Newport, Mt. St. Helens and Blireiana. All of them grow about 20 feet tall, and are moderate to fast growers.

Although some people don't realize it, many other purple-leafed plants are a better choice than the flowering plum, he says. For instance, the purple-leafed sand cherry, is a large shrub that grows about six to eight feet tall. For tall trees try Norway maples. Most reach heights of 40 to 50 feet, which makes a nice shade tree. The Crimson King Norway maple is the most popular. It has a rich, maroon leaf color throughout most of the year.

Other Norway maples with a red to purple leaf color include Crimson Sentry, Deborah and Royal Red, which is very similar to Crimson King, he adds. Crimson Sentry has a more columnar shape and pretty, red fall color. The leaves of Deborah are a darker red when they first open, and eventually turn a dark, green/bronze color as the summer progresses.

Another smaller maple with fantastic purple/red foliage is the Japanese maple, Goodspeed says. There are literally hundreds of different varieties, although only a few are sold and grown in our harsh desert environment. When buying a Japanese maple from your favorite nursery or garden center, make sure to note its mature height and spread.

“Most Japanese maples prefer some protection, especially from the hot, afternoon sun,” he says. “The one I have growing in a southern exposure does great through June or even mid-

July, then it starts to complain about the heat and lack of humidity. I used to ignore its complaining, or I'd tell it to toughen up and quit being such a wimp. I must have offended it, because it tried to die a couple of years ago. I've learned to be a little kinder and sympathize with it. That doesn't seem to help with summer scorch, but it hasn't tried to die lately."

The purple-leafed smoke tree grows to about 15 feet tall, if left unchecked, Goodspeed says. It generally looks better, though, when it's pruned regularly and grown as a small shrub. Many homeowners prune them back to the ground each year so they can enjoy the wonderful, vigorous, new, purple growth. When they are left unpruned, they can become leggy and a little frumpy looking.

"Another tree that I like is the Canadian choke cherry," he says. "The leaves of this odd tree start out green in the spring, then by late May or early June turn a showy purplish-red color. As the new growth emerges green, the tree is an odd bi-color (red and green) for a month or so."

The Canadian choke cherry can reach 25 feet and is hardy and adaptable, Goodspeed says. It can grow in almost any soil conditions. Unfortunately, this tree has one bad habit. It likes to throw out a proliferation of suckers around its trunk. Fortunately, the suckers do not move out into the lawn, but confine themselves to sprouting around the base of the tree.

There are still other trees and shrubs that have purple or red foliage - crabapples, beeches, other maples, barberries and even a redbud or two can add purple and red color to the landscape, he suggests.

For more information, contact your local [USU County Extension office](#).

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