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## Burning Bushes Are a Sign of Fall

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## GARDEN NOTES

# BURNING BUSHES ARE A SIGN OF FALL

*By Dennis Hinkamp*

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There is a group of plants that will come alive soon with brilliant red color. One in particular, known as a burning bush (*Euonymus alatus* 'Compactus'), has the most fiery-red leaves of any plant in the fall.

The *Euonymus* is a large genus of plants that are native to Japan, explains Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. They include trees, shrubs and even low-growing vines. Not all *Euonymus* have the brilliant fall color of the *Euonymus alatus*, but many can grow in Northern Utah and have some redeeming qualities. The most popular, the burning bush, is over-planted at times, but sure adds bright color to any landscape in the fall. In its native habitat, *Euonymus alatus* can grow to more than 15 feet, he says. In comparison, the plant we normally buy from a nursery, *Euonymus alatus* 'Compactus,' only reaches five to six feet when left unpruned. Its common name is dwarf burning bush.

This plant makes a nice informal hedge, mass planting or even specimen shrub, but it does have a few problems, Goodspeed says. It is susceptible to root rot, and does not like heavy soils. It is also a heavy feeder, requiring a couple of applications of nitrogen fertilizer each year to really look good. It can get overgrown and messy if left unpruned, and must be planted in full sun to get the excellent fall color that justifies its name.

There are also other *Euonymus* sold in nurseries that make good landscape plants, he says. They do not have the outstanding fall color of the burning bush, but they have other redeeming qualities. Wintercreeper *Euonymus* (*E. fortunei*) is a groundcover plant that can be trained like a vine to go through a structure, over a trellis or up a wall. In Northern Utah it is semi-evergreen, and attractive most of the year. It is classified as a fast grower with few problems.

Many different cultivars of winter creeper are available, and a couple are very popular, Goodspeed says. Emerald Gaiety has a variegated deep green leaf with white margins that turn slightly pink in the fall. Coloratus Wintercreeper is an older cultivar with deep green leaves in the summer, turning a plum-purple color in the winter.

"European *Euonymus* is a small upright tree that can reach a height of about 20 feet," he says. "It is not real common, but we have one growing in the botanical garden here at the Ogden River Parkway. It has been planted for about six years, and currently is about eight feet tall. It

has beautiful leaves, and a more natural free-flowing shape. It is not one that would make a good specimen plant, but would work for a border or as a background planting to define an area or soften a view.”

This is a good time of year to plant shrubs and trees, Goodspeed says. The nurseries and garden centers have a smaller inventory right now, but they do have some great deals, and most still have a good selection of plant materials. Fall is definitely one of the best times to plant larger plants so they can get established before winter. This gives them several months before the demands of a harsh Utah summer threaten them.

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