

Lamorinda

OUR HOMES

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Lamorinda Home Sales

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Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

Changing color guard

By Cynthia Brian



Tuck a sampling of various plants into a window box as a fall favorite.



An urn planter with elephant ears, lantana, and petunias.



Sugar maples in several colors line this path. Photos Cynthia Brian

"Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower." ~Albert Camus

After a dry and hot summer, I look forward to the warm days and cooler nights of autumn. Mostly, I get excited about the changing of the guard whereby the leaves on my many deciduous trees turn into a kaleidoscope of vibrant colors mimicking a glorious sunset.

It is November and only a handful of my trees are changing their foliage, much to my dismay. This is the time of year when I want to decorate with orange, yellow, crimson, burgundy, and gold. Because of a combination of weather conditions, chemical processes, individual genetic traits, and physiological changes, trees change their colors. When the days get shorter and the temperatures drop, trees reduce the production of chlorophyll. Chlorophyll is the green pigment that is responsible for photosynthesis and in the fall, it breaks down and disappears from the leaves allowing other colors to surge to prominence. The yellow and orange hues that we see in leaves in autumn are always present but masked by the dominant green. When the chlorophyll disappears, the sunset or sunrise colors emerge.

Some trees, specifically maples and oaks, produce anthocyanin pigments. These pigments create blue, purple, and red in the leaves. As consumers, we are familiar with anthocyanins when we "eat the rainbow," enjoying the antioxidant properties of berries, grapes, cherries, plums, pomegranates, red cabbage, eggplant, black beans, and of course, wine!

Species of trees that showcase a colorful changing of the guard in fall include Japanese Maple, Sugar Maple, Ginkgo Biloba, Red Oak, Liquidambar, Aspen, Dogwood, Black Tupelo, Chinese Pistache, Sumac, Honeylocust, Hickory, and Beech. Several of these species grow in my garden, and I hope that by Thanksgiving they will have changed into their wondrous wardrobes before the branches shed their leaves for winter.

This year I joined the ranks of tourists who are dubbed "leaf peepers" because I traveled to the Great Lakes and Canada to witness the spectacular fall foliage displays. Of all the trees I admired, it was the glorious sugar maples that won my heart as they flaunted their brilliant yellow, red, orange, and burgundy leaves.

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