

Fall LANDSCAPE COLOR

Spring isn't the only time for colorful plantings.

BY JAMIE J. GOOCH

FALL COLOR doesn't just grow on trees. Perennials and ornamentals can be combined to provide clients with late-season showiness in containers and beds.

Plant breeders continue to improve the color options available to landscapers, as well as the length of bloom time, so there are many options. Even tried-and-true fall performers such as Asters and Chrysanthemums are available in new colors, sizes and shapes. That may be the most difficult aspect of adding late-season color: deciding on the right plants.

Plants of the year

There are thousands of perennials and ornamentals to choose from, but you can narrow them down by beginning with plants tested by associations and botanical gardens. One such association, the Perennial Plant Association (PPA), has chosen *Amsonia hubrichtii* as its



'Glamour Red' kale can provide color all winter in some climates.

2011 perennial of the year.

Amsonia hubrichtii, also known as 'Arkansas Bluestar', provides three seasons of interest in zones 4 through 9. Even after its clusters of light-blue, star-shaped blooms fade in spring, the plant's feathery foliage takes over. The green, fern-like foliage turns bright

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1 *Amsonia hubrichtii* has wispy green foliage that turns bright yellow in the fall.



2 *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' stands out for its cascading yellow blades.



3 *Gaillardia x grandiflora* will bloom into early autumn.



yellow in the fall. It mounds to 3 ft. high by 3 ft. wide, so it works well in the landscape when massed together and combined with ornamental grasses.

Speaking of ornamental grasses, the variety of foliage colors and heights make them a great addition to a late-season landscape. In 2009, PPA awarded its plant of the year award to *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola,' an ornamental grass also known as Golden Japanese Forest Grass. It has variegated yellow blades with green stripes. Unlike many grasses, it has a cascading growth habit that causes the leaves to arch in the same direction. During the fall the yellow blades of grass take on shades of pink.

AAS award winners

Another organization that tests and recommends perennials is All-America Selections (AAS). Its 2011 winners include two cultivars with late-season appeal: *Gaillardia* 'Arizona Apricot' and 'Glamour Red' ornamental kale.

Gaillardia 'Arizona Apricot' has blooms with yellow edges that deepen to an apricot in the center. AAS judges noted the distinctive color of the 3 to 3.5 in. daisy-like flowers.

"Just 105 days after sowing seed, this *Gaillardia x grandiflora* will bloom from early summer into autumn," according to AAS. "The compact 12-in.-tall plants offer bright green foliage and a tidy uniform habit best viewed when planted to the front of the flower bed."

This long-flowering perennial is hardy

in USDA zones 2 through 10. It is bred by Ernst Benary of America Inc.

AAS' first winning kale is 'Glamour Red,' which has shiny, waxless leaves with vivid color. The fringed leaf type *Brassica oleracea* has a flower head size of 10 to 12 in.

This full sun annual ornamental will bloom 90 days from sowing seed to first color. Leaf coloring begins when night temperatures fall below 55°F for approximately two weeks, according to AAS. You can expect frost-tolerant blooms from November to March in warmer climates. It is bred by Takii & Co., Ltd.

Look local

To make sure plants are viable in your area, check with local growers to collect their recommendations. Look through

plant breeders' catalogs and use them as a means to discuss new cultivars with your local nurseries.

If you have a land-grant university nearby, it might work with the Cooperative Extension Service in your region on plant trials. A number of state horticultural societies also test and rate plants. A good list of these can be found on the U.S. National Arboretum site at usna.usda.gov/Gardens/faqs/pickingplants.html.

Trees and shrubs don't have to be the only bright spots in your clients' landscapes. With the right research and planning, perennials and ornamentals can bring years of seasonal color. **LM**

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KEEP IT CLEAN

To ensure late-season color has its chance to shine in the landscape, sell your clients a fall maintenance package. It's important to remove dead plant matter not only for aesthetics, but to decrease the chance of disease. A fall landscape maintenance program can also include:

- ▶ **Mulching** to protect crowns and roots from winter weather.
- ▶ **Dividing** certain perennials to prevent overcrowding.
- ▶ **Staking** tall perennials so that they aren't damaged by wind or heavy snows.
- ▶ **Weeding and fertilization** as necessary.
- ▶ **Planting** containerized perennials or moving them indoors.
- ▶ **Fall pruning** of certain flowering shrubs. —JG