



FALL COLOR – FIND IT IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

By Robin Stanley

UCCE / El Dorado County Master Gardener

My husband I take a fall foliage trip into the Sierras each October. Over the years, we have found lots of great websites to help us plan the timing and route to see the season's most beautiful color. But honestly, some of the most magnificent color we see each fall is right here in our own backyard. As I left the October Master Gardener meeting, the Chinese pistache trees planted along Highway 50 through Placerville were ablaze in the red and gold reflection of the setting sun. I have often wondered about the origin of these trees, which brighten our landscape and highway each autumn. Unlike the fall color back east, these trees, like much of the other fall color in our area, are not native, but were planted.

So what if you want to create your own fall foliage tour in your home landscape (a walking tour). What trees would provide reliable color and be a good fit for our foothill location? There are lots of lists available in books and on the web; it just takes a bit of cross-checking of lists to see what would be best for your particular location. According to Bill Marken, a former Sunset editor, there are five trees that can be counted on for California fall color. He lists ginko, Japanese maple, Chinese pistache, sweetgum (liquidamber), and Japanese persimmon. Coincidentally, the first four trees also appear on the plant list created by the Placerville Planning Department to guide residents in choosing landscape plants that are well-suited for our area. Marken does offer one word of warning about the ginko. Female trees can be messy because they drop a lot of debris, so you should be sure to choose a male tree of a labeled variety, such as 'Autumn Gold', or 'Saratoga' when shopping. It's probably not too late to take a drive around the West Slope; you will find fall color in many more locations than along Highway 50.

As for the fifth tree on Marken's list, it appears on another list, one created by James Sigala, a former administrator for the Statewide Master Gardener Program. Sigala's list focuses on a more specific goal, identifying edible plants that are also colorful in the fall. The Japanese persimmon tops his list because its "spectacular bright red to orange fall color is followed by orange ripening fruit that hangs majestically on bare branches." Other plants on his list include the 'Satsuma' plum, 'Mid-Pride' peach, many of the pluot varieties, and 'Cabernet Sauvignon' grapes.

There are other trees and shrubs on the Placerville Plant List that are favorites of mine, including dogwoods, flowering plums, red maples, smoke trees, and nandina. Most experts recommend that you select plants for seasonal color in the fall, so you can see their colors and choose what appeals most to you and your family. Since fall is also the best time for planting, visit a nursery now, before the leaves “fall” for this year.

Saturday, November 17th, Master Gardeners present a class on “Rose Selection and Planting”. The class starts at 9 a.m. and is held in the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court, Placerville. There is no charge for the class.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.

Do you have plant containers to recycle? Master Gardeners will gladly take them at the Master Gardener Office. Call before dropping them off and thank you for the donation.