

Gardens Can Be Bright Without A Single Flower

By BETTY FRANKEL
Special Writer

Not all plants have plain green leaves. There are some trees and shrubs and herbaceous plants that have red, yellow, or blue-green leaves, or leaves that have stripes or spots or edgings of a contrasting hue.

These colorful plants can be striking decorative accents in the garden, but should be used with thought to their effect on the total design of the landscaping.

Green is a soothing, rather neutral background. Red is a warm vibrant color that tends to come forward. Even a small amount of red tends to stand out. Yellows and yellow-greens stand out, too, although to a lesser extent.

Because of this quality, red-leaved plants or those with bright yellow leaves, should not be used as part of a background planting. They are choice accent plants, however, and can add a great deal of drama to the garden or enliven an otherwise rather dull looking scene. However, trees and shrubs with colored leaves should be used with great restraint. Too many in a yard should be used with thought that detracts rather than adds to the appearance of the landscaping. Use them only where you want a focal point.

Among the large trees with red leaves, the best known is the Crimson King maple. This is a special variety of Norway maple that

has deep blood red leaves that retain their bright color all summer long.

This tree can grow 90 feet tall with a rounded shape. As with other Norway maples, the leaves are so broad and dense, that it is very shady beneath the trees and as a consequence it is difficult to grow a good lawn beneath them.

The Japanese maple, which is a small maple that seldom is over 20 feet high, also has forms with deep red leaves. These are decorative, handsome plants that should be given a place of honor in any garden where they are planted. The variety known as Bloodleaf Japanese maple (Atripurpureum) is one of the best and one of the hardest. The leaves are a dark red all season. This variety has been grown in American gardens since the late 19th century and is one of the most popular and decorative of all the red-leaved woody plants.

The scarlet Japanese maple (Sanguinum), another

old-fashioned favorite, has leaves that are a lighter, brighter red. There are also forms with variegated leaves — red edged with brown and streaked with lighter hues, and green with pink and red markings. Although they are less popular there are also Japanese maples with yellow leaves.

Perhaps most beautiful of all are the varieties with deep red leaves that are finely dissected so they are delicate and lacy looking. They go by such names as

cut-leaf Japanese maple, thread-leaf Japanese maple and spider-leaf Japanese maple.

Japanese maples grow well in either slightly acid or slightly alkaline soils, but they need rich, well-drained soil with plenty of organic material in it. They do not thrive in poor, dry gravelly soils.

In order to develop and retain the most intense red color or the red leaved forms should be grown in full sun. However, the types with variegated leaves tend to have better color if grown in partial shade.

The purple-leaf plum can be grown either as a large shrub or as a small tree. These plants can eventually get up to 24 feet in height. They are easy to grow and withstand hot dry situations.

As with the maples, fullest color develops when the plants are grown in full sun. In shadier situations the color is not as intense.

There are several varieties available. Color of leaves varies, some being a much darker purple than others.

Most varieties have attractive, purple-pink flowers in early spring, and one kind, the Biceriana plum, has pretty double pink flowers. Occasionally some fruits are produced. These plums are small, but edible.

In order to remain attractive the purple-leaf plums should be pruned occasionally. The plants tend to get bushy looking and the

branches rub against each other but this is easily corrected with periodic pruning.

The Russian olive, another small shrubby tree, is widely grown for its silvery leaves. This hardy, vigorous, easy-to-grow plant is often used as a background screen, but it also makes an outstanding accent plant.

Some well-known shrubs have forms with variegated green and white leaves that are decorative. These include the red stem dogwood, weigela, and evergreen winterreger.

Among the herbaceous plants grown for their decorative colorful foliage are coleus, caladiums, and hosta lilies. In some varieties of the latter the leaves are green with white margins or green with cream stripes. There is also a form with large handsome steel-blue leaves.

Caladiums are tender plants that grow from bulbs.

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Handsome wood screens lend a contemporary look to old or new houses, often with a bonus of privacy and shade for window and entryway.

A distinctive screen that will do all this can be built by the homeowner, requiring only a saw, hammer, wrench, level and square, plus standard dimension western wood, bolts and nails.

Design of the screen will vary, according to location of the front door and sidewalk, and if there is a driveway.

A screen added to a recently completed development house, because the facade was austere and front windows were out of proportion to each other, is a good example.

Supporting posts of 4x4-inch preservative-treated Douglas fir were set in concrete footings spaced every six or eight feet across the front of the house.

Pine, cedar or other western woods can be used also.

Beams of paired 2x4s extend from posts to a plate attached to the house. If set close to the house, only vertical screens of 2x4s are used, attached to 2x6-inch stringers along the top and bottom of the posts.

If the posts are set farther out from the house, sun screens of spaced 2x2s are added across the beams. A wide wood walkway that also serves as a sitting deck can be laid the length of the screen.

The screen can tie in with a carport at the side of the house, allowing the garage to be remodeled into an extra bedroom or family room.

Before beginning construction of screens attached to the house, check with building officials on code requirements.

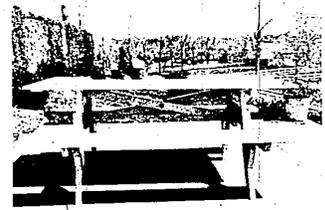
For finishes, leaving the wood to weather naturally or using a light penetrating stain will enhance the contemporary look.

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