Autumn Flowering Highlights

Keep the colour alive into the cooler months with some favourites from Melissa King.

Melissa King

Japanese windflower ‘Bowles Purple’
Autumn gives birth to some of the loveliest blooms. Autumn-flowering plants are the welcome latecomers in our gardens and more subtle and charming than the strong colours and shapes of summer.

I’ve got Japanese windflowers growing in the shade of an old maple tree and when they burst into bloom as the maple changes colour it’s a sight to behold. I enjoy growing the semi-double form ‘Whirlwind’, with white daisy-like flowers on tall stems, but there are also attractive soft pink forms like ‘Marchenfee’ or the semi-double rose pink flowering ‘Queen Charlotte’. Look out for pretty dwarf varieties, like ‘Bowles Purple’ with lovely purple-pink flowers on a plant just 30 cm tall, or ‘Pamina’ with double deep pink blooms.

Japanese windflowers really shine when they are planted en masse in the shade of trees and provide much-needed colour from late summer right through to autumn. Try growing them as part of an Asian-style planting scheme in combination with flowering azaleas, hostas or miniature cyclamen.

_Echinacea purpurea_ is another highlight of the autumn garden. It’s commonly called the coneflower because it displays attractive daisy-like flowers with a striking central cone and drooping petals. It blooms from summer right through to autumn, bringing late colour to the perennial border. ‘Magnus Superior’ is a colourful choice, with dark carmine pink blooms, or look out for a collection called Coneflower Magic Box with flowers in all of the sunset colours. Coneflowers are native to the prairies of the USA and look beautiful in a relaxed planting scheme growing amongst other late-flowering perennials like _Rudbeckias, Achilleas_ and _Sedums_.

_Salvias_ are also fabulous for bridging the gap between late summer and autumn. You’ll love ‘Impact Purple’ that flowers for months on end with an intense display of cobalt blue blooms. ‘Mexican Blue’ is another stunner, with masses of vibrant blue flowers and silvery grey foliage. At the pink end of the scale it’s hard to beat ‘Wendy’s Wish’ that displays hot magenta flowers on a shrub to 80cm tall. You might also like to try varieties in the Heatwave Collection, like ‘Blaze’ with fiery crimson blooms or the hot pink ‘Sizzle’, bred to thrive in the heat. _Salvias_ are tough, beautiful plants that do well with little water and make a real statement in the flower border, decorative pots or planted en masse in an easy-care garden.

For cheery autumn colour it’s hard to beat _Gaillardias_, with show-stopping daisy-like flowers in vibrant shades of red, yellow and orange. They flower prolifically from December right through to May and look pretty at the front of the flower border.

_Rudbeckias_ are another top choice for extending colour, with sunny yellow blooms that light up the summer and autumn garden. Taller growing _Rudbeckias_ like ‘Herbstsonne’ provide a splash of sunshine at the back of a border with masses of yellow daisies, or you might prefer the more compact ‘Goldstrum’, which has starry yellow blooms on a plant just 60cm tall.

At this time of year you realise just how valuable repeat-flowering roses are for bringing colour to the autumn garden. Last year my ‘Mother and Daughter’ rose was smothered in perfumed, vibrant yellow flowers from spring right through to late autumn. It even produced the odd rose during winter, which really made me smile. I’m also a fan of the David Austin Roses for their fragrance, beauty and long flowering period. You’ll love the apricot pink flowering ‘Abraham Darby’, crimson ‘Dark Lady’ or pale pink ‘Miss Alice’, which flower repeatedly well into autumn.

I can’t possibly talk about autumn flowers without mentioning one of my all-time favourite plants – the sasanqua camellia. The sasanquas are the earliest camellias to grace our gardens, providing colour through autumn and into winter. The sasanquas are a versatile bunch, tolerating both sun or shade, and make excellent screens, hedges and espaliers, feature shrubs or decorative potted plants. ‘Beatrice Emily’ is an old-fashioned favourite, with showy white flowers that are blushed with pink, or you might prefer the single red flowering ‘Yuletide’, which makes a stunning low-growing hedge. For something different, mass plant the ground-covering sasanqua ‘Marge Miller’ for a carpet of pink colour throughout the cooler months.

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