

Ask a Master Gardener  
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### Plants for Fall Color

Q. Does fall color in Georgia consist only of mums? That's about all I see at the plant stores. We have moved here from Ohio and are thrilled with the weather. What else will bring color to our new property? I'd like some other ideas, please. Thanks, Harriet H.

A. It does look like that until you wander past those large entrance displays and go further down the aisles. There are the ever present pansies in all the fall colors. If you are new to this area, buy pansies for all winter color. These small plants are cold hardy and create a pretty border or a mass planting. Purchase an Autumn Joy sedum which turns a lovely wine shade as it ages in October. These can be found along with its new sister, Pink Beacon, which holds her lovely pink through late fall. These two grow about two to three feet tall and as wide and can make a great color impact in your garden. When severe cold moves in they will die back to the ground but return in the spring bigger and better.

A welcoming project for your front door or drive is a pair of pots planted with two miniature boxwoods surrounded with pansies. Also add some draping vinca minor to complete the potting adage: use a thriller, a filler and a spiller, as local Master Gardener Marilyn Van Pelt advises.

Trees which turn lovely fall colors are so wonderful because they offer shade in the summer and in gloomy winter give structure to your landscape. The brilliant maple almost shouts at you with its delightful leaves showering down. The showiest ones to plant are Red Sunset, October Glory and Autumn Flame. The pre-historic Gingko tree is a golden riot of yellow. There are several here in Carroll County and their shell shaped leaves make them easily identifiable. They are as old as the dinosaurs and their distinctive leaves were found as fossils embedded in stone dating back thousands of years. They deserve a place in any yard just because of their history.

If you buy chrysanthemums or mums as you mentioned in your question, remember that they can be planted in your garden after the blooms have faded and they will return in the spring. In June when they reach 10-12 inches tall cut them back to four inches high. In early August when they will again be tall, cut them back again to four inches. The picture below shows one blooming just last week. People say they can't get them to bloom again. The secret is to cut them back twice. Possibly they grow well in our heat. They do love full sun. If you plant some every year you will have quite an array of color.

Variegated hydrangeas and variegated ivy bring light to shady areas of a fall garden. If planted in pots you can move them around as needed for a party or just to lighten up a spot. Variegated means the leaves have light stripes, spots or light edges on them which are a miracle of nature for sure. Sometimes plants mutate on their own and pretty striped leaves will appear further down a stem.

Limelight hydrangeas have stunning white blossoms, called panicles, from tip to toe. They love a sunny location and are perfect where the traditional blue ones would struggle. Limelight blooms last through October and even later if the weather cooperates, giving us a last memory of summer. They can grow eight feet or more and as wide. Plan accordingly and give them room to mature and gift you with hundreds of blossoms. Cutting one severely down to three or four feet only encourages it to grow again!

Dianthus Chinensis comes in annual and perennial types meaning the former dies in the winter and the latter returns annually, confusing, I know. I have found our relatively mild winters don't affect some dianthus which are labeled annuals. I plant all of them in the sun and most will survive here. They are a showy low growing and spreading treasure best put at the front of your garden as a border. Read the labels because some grow taller and will not fit your border needs.

The common name for dianthus is "Pinks" and yes, many of them are in shades of white, pink, red and even wine but the name comes from the ragged shape of the tiny flower edges. In Merry Olde England pinking shears which cut the distinctive zig zag edge, were termed pynken shears, hence the name. Some call them Sweet William, Maiden Pinks and Carnations to which they are related. Sniff their spicy clove fragrance; indeed they are tiny carnations. Ladies put them in nosegays and held them to their noses so as not to endure the smelly streets.

Gardening is a year round, shall we say a "perennial," hobby. Cruising the garden shops every weekend rather than shoe or car shopping is what tags one as a definite plantaholic. At the back or side of most shops is the sale counter. If you don't see one, ask the nice salesperson. Just this week one store had plants which will survive the winter and look great next year. The cost – 25 cents up to a dollar! Spice up your fall plantings and enjoy the perennial color for years to come.

For more information or answers to any of your gardening questions, contact a Carroll County Master Gardener Extension Volunteer at 770-836-8546, via e-mail at [ccmg@uga.edu](mailto:ccmg@uga.edu) or visit our office in the Ag Center at 900 Newnan Road in Carrollton.