

# The Augusta Chronicle

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## COLUMNS

# Campbell Vaughn: Looking for a tough tree with bright colors? Try the Chinese pistachio

**Campbell Vaughn** Columnist

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Since the storm, I have been asked a bunch about plants that would be good to replace some of the ones that got destroyed during Helene. I wrote a column about some of my thoughts on which plants might be a good choice for a variety of circumstances, and I got some good feedback.

I thought it would be good to expand on one of the trees I think is a good medium-sized tree to fit in our recently transformed landscapes. One of the trees that I have really enjoyed talking folks into considering over the past couple of year is the Chinese Pistachio (*Pistacia chinesnis*).

These guys are putting on a fall color show that can only be rivaled by the sugar maple. Down on Jones Street and Crawford Avenue this week, this ornamental plant is taking orange, reds and yellows to the next level of fall color.

Native to China, Taiwan and the Philippines, the Chinese pistache (also called pistachio) is about as tough of a tree as they make. This type of pistachio is related to the nut producing tree (*Pistachia vera*), but is really just a nice ornamental.

When young, this deciduous immigrant is not the prettiest of trees. Almost gawky. It reminds me a little of a less upright pecan when small.

With some early proper pruning, this tree will evolve into a nice oval shaped crown. The leaf density is full but not too thick. The branching is somewhat loose while being upright to arching. The leaves are a nice lustrous green during the growing season, but the fall color is what takes this tree to the next level.

The reds and oranges of the fall leaves on this plant are almost like they have been plugged into an electrical outlet. They are so bright and colorful that you can't miss them.

I planted a Chinese pistachio in my mother's yard about five years ago. After the super show of fall color happens and it finally loses its leaves, the bare open branches seem to be a great place for birds to roost. Sometimes you can see several male cardinals in all their red glory perched up ready to zip over to the feeders for some black oil sunflower seed.

**Campbell Vaughn:** Blooming Yuletide camellias are turning a frown upside down

Drought tolerant and mostly pest free, the Chinese pistachio reaches about 35 feet tall, and 25 feet spread. The growth rate is medium, which means planting a smaller tree (7 or 15 gallon) won't take too long to make its presence known in the landscape.

It does need well-drained soils, and some good sun and a little moisture to help with establishment.