



# Seasonal Glory

BY LYNN SCHUELER

---

**ABOVE:** *Viburnum opulus* 'Nanum' putting on fall color in the Pat Calvert Greenhouse.

The Pat Calvert Greenhouse sells young trees, shrubs and perennials grown from seeds or cuttings taken primarily from the collection plants at Washington Park Arboretum. It is, without doubt, one of the best places in the region to find unusual plants for your garden—and all plant purchases directly support the maintenance needs and kids' environmental education programs at the Arboretum.

The Greenhouse is a volunteer-run operation, and has been since it opened in 1959. All the volunteers have their own favorite plants that they work with. Following are some of my favorite trees and shrubs with fall interest that we propagate. Most of them have multiple seasons of interest. Come and see them out in the Arboretum and, if one takes your fancy, stop by the greenhouse—just

to the south of the Graham Visitors Center, to take a little piece of the Arboretum home with you.

## Orangebark Stewartia

Stewartias are known as four-season plants. In winter, interesting peeling or mottled bark catches the low, slanting sun. Spring's warming days bring attractive leaf buds that pop open to reveal delicate, fresh leaves. Cup-shaped white flowers with fluffy yellow stamens decorate the graceful branches in summer, with *Stewartia pseudocamellia* var. *koreana* boasting the showiest blossoms. But the star of the genus for autumn is *Stewartia monadelphica*, the orangebark stewartia—with its reliable, rich orange-red, maroon or brilliant-red foliage that glows in the shortening days of fall.



## FAVORITE FALL- INTEREST PLANTS AT THE PAT CALVERT GREENHOUSE

The Pat Calvert crew has collected seed from the four stunning specimens of this plant that grow just north of the New Zealand Forest and east of Lookout Gazebo. Over 70 years old, these small trees range from 25 to 50 feet tall and 20 to 30 feet wide. A seedling will probably reach 10 to 15 feet tall in 10 years. Perfectly hardy in the Puget Sound, *Stewartia* is easy to grow in regular garden soil in sun or light shade.

### Crape Myrtle Cultivars

In the 1990s, the beds in the parking lot at the Center for Urban Horticulture were renovated and planted with a display of crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia*) cultivars, much to the delight of the greenhouse volunteers. We had been restricted to two cultivars in the Arboretum for

our cuttings (both hybrids of *Lagerstroemia indica* and *L. fauriei*), but now we have access to a wide variety of cultivars. Crape myrtles are deciduous small trees or large shrubs from Asia and northern Australia, with large clusters of crinkly-petaled flowers of white, pink, red, lavender or purple that bloom from late summer to fall. In autumn, the leaves flame brilliantly in the full range of possible colors—yellows, oranges and reds—depending on the cultivar. The attractive bark (often peeling, but also mottled or smooth) is a winter bonus.

The Arboretum's plants are easy to find. Look for *Lagerstroemia* 'Natchez' at the north end of Graham Visitors Center parking lot, with its huge, white flower trusses and yellow to red-orange fall foliage. Not far to the west of this specimen, at the north end of Azalea Way, you'll see three

tall, narrow, tree-size *L. 'Muskogee'* in a tight cluster. You may not notice their lavender flowers way at the top, but you will definitely appreciate the trees' vertical trunks and light, gray-brown bark, as well as their red-orange fall color. Crape myrtles are heat-lovers and like a warm spot to perform well; the reflected heat from the parking lot helps the Arboretum's 'Natchez' bloom so profusely. The taller, tree-like forms of *Lagerstroemia* are often used in parking strips. Provide your crape myrtles with full sun, good drainage and moderately fertile soil, and they will reward you with a glorious fall display.



Fall foliage of *Stewartia monadelphica* in the Arboretum.  
(Photo by Joy Spurr)

### ***Sorbus forrestii***

The Brian O. Mulligan Sorbus Collection in Washington Park Arboretum is located along the east side of Arboretum Drive, a lovely short stroll from Graham Visitors Center. One of the most complete collections of *Sorbus* in the nation, it was named for the former director of the Arboretum. The genus *Sorbus* is divided into two groups: the whitebeam or rowan, which bear simple leaves, and the mountain ash, which bear pinnate leaves (compound leaves made up of rows of leaflets). *Sorbus forrestii* is said to have been one of Brian Mulligan's favorites. This small, deciduous mountain ash from western China has rich, blue-green leaves that turn brilliant reds and oranges in fall and clusters of white flowers that bloom in spring. In autumn, large, white (non-edible) berries with dark-pink tips develop and

hold on well into winter. Our specimens (there are two in the Arboretum altogether) date back to 1995 and are about 10 to 15 feet tall and wide. *Sorbus* grow well in the Puget Sound region in regular garden soil and sun or light shade.

### **Evergreen Osmanthus**

No, they don't have fabulous foliage fireworks. No, they don't have big, beautiful berries in the late season. But the little white flowers of *Osmanthus* pack an amazing fragrance, the kind that wafts through the air and makes you look around, sniffing, wondering where that lovely



Fall color on *Lagerstroemia 'Muskogee'* in the Arboretum.  
(Photo by Joy Spurr)

scent is coming from. Evergreen osmanthus, often quite large shrubs, have neat, attractive foliage (sometimes variegated) and are usually used as background shrubs or hedging. Two autumn bloomers we love are *Osmanthus heterophyllus*, a Japanese species with holly-like leaves, and *O. × fortunei*, a hybrid of *O. heterophyllus* and the Asian *O. fragrans*. You'll find both at the Greenhouse, plus two stunning variegated selections of *Osmanthus heterophyllus*: 'Variegatus', which bears cream-edged, dark green leaves and grows eight to ten feet tall, and 'Goshiki', which has green leaves splotted with yellow and grows slowly to five feet tall and wide. Both variegated plants are late-season stars in the Witt Winter Garden at the Arboretum. *Osmanthus* grow well in regular garden conditions in our area.

### *Viburnum opulus* ‘Nanum’

The genus *Viburnum* has many candidates for the autumn garden that sport colorful leaves and berries. Most viburnums are large shrubs, but *Viburnum opulus* ‘Nanum’ makes an appealing, dense, two- to three-foot-tall, spreading mound of maple-shaped leaves, often tinged burgundy in spring and turning burgundy to vibrant red in fall. Rarely flowering, this little shrub is grown for its form and foliage and looks best in a shrub or mixed border as a companion with other plants. There is a cluster of them near the north end of the Graham Visitors Center parking lot, a chal-



*Osmanthus heterophyllus* ‘Variegatus’ offers fall fragrance and foliage interest. (Photo by Niall Dunne)

lenging spot to grow any plants because of car and foot traffic. Viburnums are easy to grow in moist garden soil in sun or partial shade, but this cultivar does not like to get too dry.

### Winterberry and *Ilex serrata* cultivars

These two deciduous hollies hail from opposite ends of the world: *Ilex verticillata* (winterberry) is a suckering shrub that grows at the edges of woods or in swamps in the eastern and central U.S., as well as north into Canada, while *Ilex serrata* is a bushy plant that grows wild in Japan and Sichuan, China. Luckily, they grow well together. And they are compatible on other levels, too: Selections have been made from each species, and crosses between the two have yielded yet more plants. Both species and their cultivars bear male and female flowers on separate plants, so when you pick a female clone for

its attractive berries, be sure you also plant a male clone to pollinate her. One male plant can pollinate several female plants, and you can tuck him into the back of a cluster so you just see the berry-producing clones. Just make sure he’s within 10 feet of your female plants.

In the Arboretum, berries of these *Ilex* start coloring in October before leaf fall, when they contrast nicely with the green foliage. (And the berries last well into winter, creating a striking glow through a dusting of snow.) At the greenhouse, we have *Ilex* ‘Harvest Red’, a female hybrid that forms a vigorous, irregularly rounded



Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) fruits and foliage. (Photo by SB Johnny/Wikimedia Commons)

shrub about 10 feet tall and wide—which bears abundant, bright-red berries and red-purple fall foliage. We also sell *Ilex verticillata* ‘Sunset’, a female cultivar that grows up to eight feet tall and wide and produces copious amounts of large, red berries. For pollination, we have an unnamed dwarf male clone that blooms over a long period of time and grows up to four feet tall and wide. Best grown in moist soil in full sun, these hollies also tolerate heavy and wet soils, but their leaf edges will crisp if conditions are too dry. ☺

LYNN SCHUELER has volunteered with Pat Calvert Greenhouse and at Arboretum Foundation events for 21 years. During that time, she has learned about many amazing plants in the Arboretum. She also cherishes the friendships she has made with her fellow volunteers over the years.