

Fall Colors

As a nursery manager I was often asked what trees to plant for fall color. Sometimes, before they talked to me, customers had seen pictures of trees and selected those with the brightest fall colors. I often had to tell them that the trees they had selected would not grow well--or even survive--in our alkaline soil, so our nursery didn't stock them. Some trees with wonderful fall color are cold hardy enough to survive here but do not grow well in our soils. Red Maple (not to be confused with red-leaved Norway Maples), 'Autumn Blaze' Maple, Sweet Gum, Red Oak, and Scarlet Oak will not survive long in alkaline soil, nor will the fall color be good here.

But many trees that provide outstanding fall color grow very well in Pocatello. For excellent golden yellow fall color, plant Norway Maple, Green Ash, Honey Locust, Linden, and Poplar. All have golden color as good as any trees anywhere.

For red-orange fall colors, many small-medium trees are good choices. The small tree with the brightest fall color is the Sumac. Its vivid reds and oranges are unequaled. Close relatives with superb fall color are the Smoke Tree and the American Smoke Tree. Ornamental crab apples are known for fall color as well as spring flowers. 'Bechtel' and 'Brandywine' crabs have the best orange-red color; 'Red Barron', 'Indian Magic', and 'Indian Summer' are also good. Several hawthorns have good fall color in the red-purple range, but the best are Washington Hawthorn and 'Winter King'. Flowering Pears have good fall color if they haven't been overwatered. Sargent Cherry, a medium-sized tree, has superb red-orange color under all conditions in Pocatello. Amur Maple has excellent color but is marginal in alkaline soils--especially if irrigated heavily. Our native Canyon or Bigtooth Maple colors brilliantly but requires dry soil in late summer and fall, or it will only turn pale yellow.

Larger trees with good red-orange fall color are less available for Pocatello. One of the best is 'Sensation' Boxelder. Though Boxelders are often poor quality trees, 'Sensation' is an improved variety with good orange fall color and no fruits. Although not commonly planted here, several large Sugar Maples are thriving in Pocatello and Blackfoot; these turn brilliant orange. 'Pacific Sunset' and 'Norwegian Sunset' Maples do not often color well in heavily irrigated lawns. American Ash varieties, such as 'Autumn Purple' and 'Autumn Applause', are probably the best large trees for red-purple fall color.

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