

# Favourite Plants for Fall

*By Scott Austin*

It may be hard to fathom but all the signs of autumn's imminent arrival are there. Feel how cool it is in the morning. Notice the skies darkening earlier every evening and the wasps becoming more aggressive as they search for protein. And here's a sure sign that autumn is on its way: more hockey talk in the sports media!

With fall on the horizon it's a good time to take stock of the garden, evaluate what is still looking good and plan how to make the most of what many consider the best season of all in the Okanagan. It might be time to introduce a few plants that will give the late summer garden a facelift and get you revved up for a new season outside.

Garden mums showing up in some retail outlets and are omnipresent in garden centres and groceries stores. Fall asters are a cheerful alternative to the chrysanthemum. Their multi-petalled blooms with bright yellow centres come in a variety of colours. Asters are hardier than mums and the newer varieties are more compact so they don't need pinching of the growing tips like earlier in the summer.

Some perennials seem to grow moderately well through the summer and then suddenly take off when September arrives. I find that many of the newer Coral Bells, or Heuchera, follow this pattern. There are some amazing patterns and colours available right now, perfect for an empty spot near the front of a border or as a filler plant for a fall-themed container for the deck or front door.

One of my favourite fall plants is Sedum 'Autumn Joy.' I never get tired of watching this plant bubble out of the cold early spring soil, unfurl its fleshy foliage and finally develop its flowers which look like pink broccoli heads. Autumn Joy has several worthy relatives, most notably those cultivars which have darker burgundy or red foliage. Again these are terrific choices for fall borders or containers.

Ornamental grasses always play a leading role in the garden in autumn, with their dramatic foliage and often dainty blooms. The Switch grasses, or Panicum, are a group of grasses that are becoming more popular. Their foliage emerges a bright blue-grey in many cases, with several cultivars then turning to a beautiful purple-red as the weather cools. The flowers are incredibly delicate panicles, which twitch in the slightest of breezes and look amazing in the sunlight. The Gardens feature several different types of grasses, well worth a visit on a sunny fall day.

Just as geraniums hit their stride in September, with the blooms lasting much longer in the cooler temperatures, Osteospermum, the African daisy, thrives

during the late summer and early to mid-autumn. If you've never grown these in the garden later in the year, give them a try; you'll be very impressed with the quantity and quality of their blooms. They are available in yellows and oranges, perfect colours for the autumn garden.

Enjoy these last warm afternoons at the beach or on your deck and hold onto that summer mindset for a little while longer. But start planning for September and beyond; the garden holds great promise ahead.