

Plan for Flowering Sequence to Last All Year

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Photo to be credited to David W. Marshall, University of Florida IFAS Extension: Japanese magnolia.jpg

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The amount of color in the landscape is often dependent on the number of flowers we have in our landscape. We really heavily on flowers such as pansies, snapdragons, petunias, and other flowering annuals and perennials. However, if we also use flowering shrubs and trees in the landscape, we greatly increase our possibilities for color in the landscape. In addition, flowering shrubs and trees survive for many years in the landscape, taking our use of color in the landscape to a higher level.

One of the most interesting features of flowering shrubs is that their flowering season follows a natural pattern that is predictable. A gardener who is aware of this and selects carefully can have at least one species in bloom during every month of the year.

Watch the natural sequence of flowering throughout the upcoming year and you will have some valuable information for use in your own landscape. Following are some examples of colorful shrubs that bloom during the different seasons.

During winter, camellias become the focus in many gardens. There are many varieties, including early, mid and late season bloomers that provide color from November through February. *Osmanthus fragrans*, commonly known as sweet osmanthus, provides fragrant flowers in the winter also.

The Oriental or Japanese magnolias begin flowering in February. They are a welcome sight with their large pink, lavender, and purple blossoms. Forsythia shrubs, also known as "February Bells," show their yellow color at about the same time. The red buckeye, a native shrub, puts forth red flower spikes in native and naturalistic plantings.

Spring sees azaleas in full bloom in our area. But, at the same time, other shrubs are also showing off: spiraea, beautyberry, loropetalum, raphiolepis (Indian Hawthorne), viburnum, pineapple guava, and banana shrub.

As soon as azalea flowers begin to fade, some late spring bloomers take over. The gardenias, with their white blossoms and unmatched fragrance, are very popular. Meanwhile, bottlebrush begins to come into full flower with its showy red brush-like flowers.

The hydrangeas, in various colors, take over in late spring to early summer. Varieties of the French hydrangea, also known as *Hydrangea macrophylla* or house hydrangea, are the most popular. The oakleaf hydrangea, a native with creamy white flower clusters, blooms at about the same time.

Summer brings the crape myrtle season to our area of the country. Flowering begins about the first week of June and continues throughout the summer. Other shrubs that provide summer color include abelia, lantana, Texas sage, and oleander.

During the fall, sansanqua camellias draw much attention. This early flowering species is very cold hardy, begins blooming in October, and continues for several weeks. Cassia shrubs such as the candelabra plant and butterfly cassia are equally showy.

These are only a few of the shrubs that flower during the different seasons. It is interesting to see how well the different species are attuned to their specific flowering times and how these characteristics can be used to advantage in the landscape.

Ever wonder why plants flower at a particular time every year? This complex reaction is often based upon environmental conditions. Flowering, or the reproductive phase, is triggered by day length in some cases. With other species, it is the accumulation of sufficient exposure to low temperatures and in others, it could be a combination of both.

Question of the Week: I have a sweetgum tree, and have two questions about it. How can I tell if it is a male or female? There are flat brown growths on the twigs and branches. Is this normal?

Answer: Sweetgums are monoecious, meaning that both male and female flowers are found on the same tree, but in different places on the branches. The flat structures on the branches of sweetgum are botanically known as “wings,” and are normal.

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