

Subtle fall colors should be treasured

By the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum

In the middle of summer, we can begin to take color for granted.

Blossoms in gardens and containers are made even brighter by harsh sunlight. There can be so much color in the landscape that even the brightest flower will hardly draw our glance.

In fall, the sunlight is less intense, flowers have faded from summer's heat and summer's colorful annuals have begun to decline.

Fall is a time for more subtle beauty, a time to slow down our pace and pay more attention to the slow but steady seasonal changes.

The fall foliage of trees and shrubs will add their own bright colors, but there are many perennials that bloom into autumn; some will bloom so late in the season that we're more likely to notice them from inside than outdoors.

For shrubs, there's blue mist spirea with soft blue flowers on silvery foliage, rose-of-Sharon with its bright hollyhock blossoms, an abundance of roses still in bloom and the subtle, yellow-to-copper blossoms of witchhazel.

One of the few fall-blooming bulbs is Colchium. It's too late to plant for this year, but it's a great addition to any garden, offering low-lying color when we least expect it.

Plumbago is one of the few groundcovers that bloom in fall. The bright blue blossoms are dramatic against green foliage, which will turn to purple and red later in the season.

Perennial geraniums also are low-lying and many of them will bloom into fall, including the popular hybrid Rozanne.

Asters are some of the best-loved fall flowers, and there's a range of colors and heights for any garden. New England asters, among the tallest, are best combined with other grasses or perennials to hold them upright.

They work well with Boltonia, another member of the aster family with airy white flowers.

Other back-of-the-border perennials for fall are goldenrod ('Fireworks' is one of the most delicate), Agastache, pitcher sage, Gaura, coneflower, anemone and Rudbeckia.

Mums or chrysanthemums are fall standards. Clara Curtis is a particular beauty in this group; it's somewhat looser in habit and has soft pink blossoms that are more natural in appearance than most mums.

Sedums really shine in the fall and they also come in a range of sizes and colors, with foliage and blossoms that persist through winter.

Phlox may not be thought of as a fall-bloomer but Phlox paniculata 'Laura' can bloom from July into October.

Other lesser known fall-blooming perennials are monkshood, turtlehead and toad lily.

The blossoms of toad lily are complex in appearance and look somewhat like a small orchid. They are arranged all along the arching stems and tend to come into bloom just as gardeners have given up on the garden.

