

A kaleidoscope garden

Dynamic color-shifting shrubs keep the excitement going all year long

FALL

BY ERICA BROWNE GRIVAS

Why settle for a static view when your landscape can put on an ever-changing show? Color-changing shrubs keep the garden exciting year-round, and they're a trend that's catching on with gardeners and landscapers. These dynamic shrubs maximize space and enjoyment, and value — ensuring fresh perspectives throughout the year — and growers are serving up great choices, from classics to brand-new cultivars.

“I think that, selfishly, all of us want constant change within the garden,” said Nicholas Staddon, plantsman and consultant. “I think plants within the garden should herald the seasons. I think the more interest we can have in a garden accentuated with color whether through leaf change, flower or bark — I think we need to plant plants that drive us out into the garden 365 days a year.”

More than blooms

Megan McConnell, plant information director for **Monrovia Nursery**, >>



SPRING

First Editions® Tianshan® Seven-Son Flower (*Heptacodium Miconioides* 'Minhep') has beautiful whorls of white blooms that emerge in summer in time for the monarch migration. The sepals turn red (top photo) in fall as the leaves turn yellow, providing great dimension of color as the seasons change. PHOTOS COURTESY OF BAILY NURSERIES

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The large upright panicles of Berry White® Panicle Hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata* 'Renba' PP28509) shift, starting at the bottom, from white to dark pink, the hue deepening as temperatures drop. PHOTOS COURTESY OF BAILEY NURSERIES



Love Child® Sweetspire (*Itea virginica* 'Bailteaone' PP31318) is a rounded compact variety with bright green foliage that turns shades of burgundy in the fall. PHOTOS COURTESY OF BAILEY NURSERIES

a California-based grower with its largest farm in Dayton, Oregon, especially appreciates these changes in the shoulder seasons. “I know, for me, getting up close to my plants and seeing them change and grow brings a lot of joy,” said McConnell. “A lot of attention is paid to flowers, but foliage can be a great way to bring color into the garden, especially in early spring or fall, when you might not have as much blooming. I love [it] in spring when deciduous shrubs start to leaf out. Sweet, tiny little leaves signaling that a dreary winter is coming to an end. It’s even more exciting when that fresh growth is an interesting color.”

Shrubs are powerhouses, many offering multi-seasonal interest in relatively compact packages, an attribute more and more home gardeners are tapping into in today’s smaller gardens.

“Shrubs do the heavy lifting of providing gardens with color long after blooms have faded,” said Natalie Carmolli, public relations specialist for **Spring Meadow Nursery’s** Proven Winners® ColorChoice®. “Shrubs start the season with a bang, bringing colors like deep purple, bright chartreuse, and candy apple red, as well as variegated versions that will make you slam on the brakes to take a picture. Then, if that weren’t enough, in a ‘hold my beer’ moment, they then transition in color or offer a late-season floral surprise.”

These shape-shifters reward close observation, noted Ryan McEnaney, marketing and communications manager of **Bailey Nurseries**, the Minnesota-based grower that has three Oregon farms at Dayton, Sauvie Island and Yamhill. Whether in leaf, flower, fruit, or bark, they deliver vibrant costume changes across the season.

“These aren’t just shrubs that change color — they’re plants that add new blooms, evolving foliage, and developing textures all year long. Spring brings fresh leaves and flowers, summer deepens the colors and fills out the form, fall ignites the landscape with bold hues, and winter highlights both structure and bark.” »

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Double Play® Candy Corn® *Spiraea*,” (*Spiraea japonica* ‘NCSX1’) starts out candy apple red, transitions to bright green in summer as purple blooms pop out, then develops a gorgeous orange glow in the fall. PHOTO COURTESY OF SPRING MEADOW NURSERY



First Editions® Jade Parade® Sand Cherry (*Prunus pumila* ‘UCONNPP002’ PP33014) has branches completely covered in white flowers that attract pollinators early in the season and the foliage turns blue-green in the summer and a fiery red in the fall. PHOTO COURTESY OF BAILEY NURSERIES

Large shrubs

In the large shrub/small tree category, there are many options that provide a focal point for the small garden.

McEnaney highlighted lesser-known First Editions® Tianshan® Seven-Son Flower (*Heptacodium Miconioides* ‘Minhep’), which tops out at 8–12 feet tall by 5–7 feet wide. “Tianshan has beautiful whorls of white blooms that emerge in summer in time for the monarch migration. The sepals turn red in fall as the leaves turn yellow, providing great dimension of color as the seasons change. As this large shrub/small tree matures in the landscape, the stems thicken up and bark begins to exfoliate. The structure of the plant itself combined with the exfoliating bark makes a statement in the winter garden.”

A columnar selection of serviceberry, First Editions® Standing Ovation™ Serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*

‘Obelisk’), another McEnaney pick, stands out with spring white flowers, summer berries and fall color. It can reach 15 feet while spanning 4 feet wide and could make a great three-season hedge or privacy screen.

Arbutus compacta is a lovely small shrub Staddon admired for its appeal throughout the year. Cinnamon bark shines against glossy emerald foliage, then pink and ivory flowers, yellow-emerging fruit which turns strawberry red.

At **Youngblood Nursery** in Salem, Oregon, office manager Mackenzie Allaert said vase-shaped *Viburnum bodnantense* ‘Dawn’ is a perennial best seller, beloved for its changing features, from cinnamon bark and pink fragrant flowers in winter to bold autumn color and blue fruit.

Medium-sized options

Among shrubs in the 4–7 foot range, Staddon called out upright-

growing *Grevillea* ‘King’s Celebration’, whose change is in the foliage. The needles emerge green, gradually sporting a silver stripe that gives the plant a luminous gray cast. It’s red-and-white bicolor flowers create high contrast, and delight hummingbirds.

Camellia ‘Nuccio’s Bella Rossa’ is a more subtle shifter whose velvet crimson blooms not only last exceptionally well, but Staddon enjoys the distinctive blue edge the flowers develop with age.

Carmolli recommended *Camellia* Just Chill Red Tip™ (*Camellia* ‘FARROWCJRF’ PPAF), named for striking foliage that emerges red with a lime green midrib and shifts to green before soft pink flowers arrive in autumn. It also makes a great specimen reaching 5–8 feet tall and 5–6 feet wide.

While its foliage persists year-round, “evergreen” doesn’t feel like a fair



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Golden Child™ Arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis* 'Mirjam' PP 20127) has chartreuse foliage that turns golden yellow at the ends. In the winter it turns a nice copper color. PHOTO COURTESY OF MONROVIA NURSERY



'Tres Amigos'® Abelia (*Abelia grandiflora* 'Mincautri') has tricolor foliage in romantic tones of green, cream and pink dramatically set off by deep red stems. PHOTO COURTESY OF SPRING MEADOW NURSERY

description for non-edible Orangena™ *Vaccinium brevipedicellatum* 'HINO GV'). McConnell noted it puts on an everchanging show as the new leaves are continually emerging an orange-red contrasting to the mature leaves' deep green. At 4 feet tall and wide' and easily pruned, it makes a colorful boxwood alternative.

Another uncommon ever-green McConnell recommended is Sweetmaroon™ Myrtle (*Myrtus communis* 'Monfazed' PPAF). "Winter through early spring the branches are tipped with red to maroon foliage By summer, the foliage is bright emerald green, so it's a great backdrop for all your summer blooms. This is also a great boxwood alternative."

For real showboating, Staddon loved native *Physocarpus*, or ninebark, which goes through multiple metamorphoses.

Let's start with pioneering 'Diabolo,' whose leaves start out coppery red, skewing to dark burgundy and almost purple — even before the red flower buds open to white flowers followed by blue berries. Recently, breeders are delivering cultivars for tight spaces like 'Coppertina,' 'Little Devil,' and 'Dart's Gold,' each offering a unique palette.

McEnaney recommended First Editions® Amber Jubilee™ Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Jefam' PP23177) for extra foliar zing. "As Amber Jubilee wakes up in spring, the leaves emerge with the colors you'd imagine for fall, with orange, yellow, and gold foliage accented by white flowers. In summer, the leaves turn a beautiful dark green. And then in fall, the leaves turn a bright red."

We can't talk about chameleon-like shrubs without mentioning hydrangeas,

whose blossoms shift as the weather cools and as they dry. Staddon pointed out oak-leaved hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) and its cultivars. "For any garden, large or small, I think this is a must-have plant," he said.

"You've got these fabulous big leaves, great green foliage, and as the season goes on white flowers maturing to pink or rose and the foliage goes from green to red, sometimes even a dark ruby color. Then you've got this great light brown exfoliating bark. You've got a plant for all seasons that is easy-to-maintain and to grow."

Among cultivars, Staddon recommends 'Munchkin' at 4 feet by 4 feet and 'Ruby Slippers' at 4–5 feet x 4–5 feet, both more compact than the species, which can range up to 12 feet high.

At Bailey's, McEnaney selected Berry White® Panicle Hydrangea (*Hydrangea*

paniculata 'Renba' PP28509) for its floral show. The large upright panicles shift, starting at the bottom, from white to dark pink, the hue deepening as temperatures drop.

Allaert recommended *Pieris japonica* 'Flaming Silver' for its evergreen foliage which emerges vivid red, then mellows to brightly variegated silver and green, offering a two-tone contrast, as well as its pink flowers. This shrub is dense and compact at 4–5 feet x 4–5 feet.

She also highlighted upright *Callicarpa bodinieri* var. *giraldii* 'Profusion'. It's known best for its iridescent violet berries in fall, but don't miss the bronze-tinged new foliage which darkens to purple in autumn before falling.

Compact chameleons

There are also a variety of selections that growers are offering up that are 4 feet or smaller.

Abelia are famous for their mul- >>



Camellia Just Chill Red Tip™ (*Camellia* 'FARROWCJRF' PPAF) emerges red with a lime green midrib and shifts to green before soft pink flowers arrive in autumn. PHOTO COURTESY OF SPRING MEADOW NURSERY



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tihued foliage; there's even one called 'Kaleidoscope.' But Natalie Carmolli chose 'Tres Amigos'® *Abelia* (*Abelia grandiflora* 'Mincautri'), which has tricolor foliage in romantic tones of green, cream and pink dramatically set off by deep red stems. "White spring flowers with rosy sepals perch atop this strongly variegated selection. It's a nice compact size too, at just 2–3 feet tall and 3.5 feet wide."

Many spiraeas are likewise known for color play, but Carmolli called out one. "Nothing, and I mean nothing, will take you on a wilder color ride than Double Play® Candy Corn® *Spiraea*," (*Spiraea japonica* 'NCSX1' PP28313), she said. "The foliage on this petite 1.5–2.5 foot shrub starts out candy apple red, transitions to bright green in summer as purple blooms pop out on top, then develops a gorgeous orange glow in the fall. [It's] as tough and drought/deer resistant as you

expect a spirea to be, but oh so much more interesting than conventional varieties."

Monrovia's McConnell pointed out Golden Child™ Arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis* 'Mirjam' PP20127). "The fresh chartreuse foliage turns golden yellow at the ends. In the winter it turns a nice copper color. It's a great compact globe shape, reaching only 18–24 inches tall and wide. But the reason this one was picked, why it really stood out from others in our trials, was it faced the extreme temperatures of the heat dome in Oregon and didn't burn or scorch. That's why we called it our Golden Child."

"If you need a low-growing shrub that brings spring flowers, great summer texture, and bright fall color, First Editions® Jade Parade® Sand Cherry (*Prunus pumila* 'UCONNPP002' PP33014) is my favorite," said McEnaney. "This sprawling shrub is a native selection that only reaches 2–3 feet tall and spreads

up to 5–6 feet. In spring, the branches are completely covered in white flowers that attract pollinators early in the season. In summer, the glossy, blue-green foliage adds texture to the garden as the branches fill in gaps in the garden beautifully. In fall, the foliage turns bright red, appearing like a fiery carpet in the landscape."

Youngblood's Allaert recommended *Cornus stolonifera* 'Kelseyi,' aka Kelsey's Dwarf Dogwood, delivering many costume changes in a small footprint of 2–2.5 feet tall and wide. Known for their bright red winter stems, they also offer white flowers and berries that are a "food source for various species of birds, as well as attract bees and butterflies." ☺

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