



## Vine LINE



### Fall 2024

Grow your native garden with monocots. Take a tour of the Garden's fall foliage. Prepare your rose garden for winter.

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## Hello, My Fellow Plant Enthusiast!

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As you may notice by the opening sentences in the articles below, we are excited for

There is something about cool crisp October mornings, the sound of a forest as leaves are falling, and the smell of the earth after a November rain, that somehow create both excitement and a sense of restfulness. The first change of leaves breathes new life into a tired gardener's bones after months of hot sun, humidity, drought, and labor. I always say fall is my favorite season, though I say that about every season as it first starts. I find each season brings its own unique spirit, and it is always something my own spirit has been ready and waiting for just as it sneaks up on me.

If spring is full of excitement and new energy, autumn has a sort of restful energy. If I take a step back and look at our seasons of life, spring might be adolescence and your early twenties when everything is new and exciting, whereas fall would feel closer to retirement and empty nesting. It holds some reflection or even an aching as many wonderful things have passed, but it also holds a different and new kind of beauty. It is an energy that moves us towards rest.

Think about it this way, in spring I am excited to drink my coffee and get the veg. starts in the ground, but in autumn I am excited to drink my coffee and sit on the porch with my wife and look at the changing leaves.

Of course, another one of my favorite things about fall is it is cool enough to get back out and plant again and get to those pre-winter garden chores! I say without hesitation that some of the best fall color in Memphis is on our campus at the Garden so please come out and see us!

*David Drose*

MBG Director of Horticulture

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# Sedges and Rushes and Grasses, Oh MY!

By Hannah Hooks, My Big Backyard Horticulturist

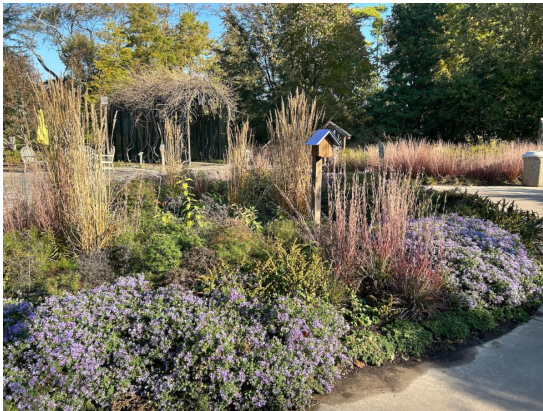
If you are looking to add more native plants to your home garden, look no further! Grasses, sedges, and rushes can add great structure and fall interest to your garden. All grasses, sedges, and rushes are monocots, which bear a single seed leaf. So what is the difference? **Grasses** have hollow round stems with nodes; nodes look like joints in the stem. **Sedges** have triangular-shaped stems without nodes or hollow stems. Plants in the *Carex* genus fall into the sedge category. **Rushes** have round stems without nodes or hollow stems and zero to little leaves. Plants in the *Juncus* genus fall into the category of rushes.

Here is my way of remembering with a rhyme:

“Sedges have edges, rushes are round, and grasses have nodes from the top to the ground” ...most of the time.

There are always exceptions to the rule but generally a species will fall into these categories. Also, watch out for common names that can be misleading. For example: Broomsedge is a grass, bulrush is a sedge, etc.

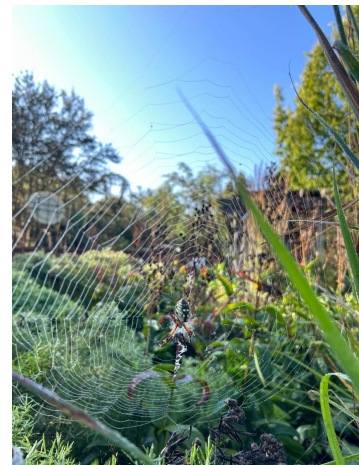
Besides adding structure and fall interest, there are other valuable uses for grass-like plants in your yard or garden. First off, grasses are generally low maintenance. As a gardener, I am always looking to add more perennials and low-maintenance plants to help manage the workload. Many of these native grasses only need to be cut back once a year, in the late winter or early spring. You can leave their plumes, panicles, or seed heads up for winter interest and wildlife support. Many species provide beautiful fall colors in shades of yellow, blue, and purple.



Native grass-like plants are also beneficial for wildlife and biodiversity. Native grasslands are one of the most endangered ecosystems in the Mid-South. They provide habitat and resources for birds and small mammals, as well as nesting materials for native bees. If you want to see more beneficial insects and increase bird activity around your home, grasses are a good addition. The grass family is a larval host for most banded skippers and most of the satyer species.

Lastly, grass-like plants help suppress weeds, reduce erosion, and conserve water. Many native grasses are drought tolerant, meaning you won't need to water them as often. They also have deep roots, sometimes as deep as 10 feet deep. Typically the root system will match the growth of the plant above ground. This means that these grasses will help improve your soil texture and structure, reducing erosion.

If you have a moist to wet site, you might want to look into some of the native rushes or sedges. Many rushes prefer moist, shady areas, they can even be found in wetlands with standing water. They can help to clean or improve water quality as well.



A few of my favorite native grasses are below!

## **Little bluestem / *Schizachyrium scoparium***

This grass shows off its beautiful color year round. In the



summer it starts blue and fades to a silver hue, then turns more purple in the fall. Little bluestem gets about 4-5 feet tall and some cultivars such as 'Standing Ovation' only get about 3-4 feet in height.

### **Yellow Prairie Grass / *Sorghastrum nutans***

This grass is on the larger side getting 5-7 feet tall and has beautiful golden fall foliage.

### **White Tinged Sedge / *Carex albicans***

This sedge is great for a shady or wooded area. It gets 1-1.5 feet tall and can form a lush ground cover if planted in masses.

### **Switchgrass / *Panicum virgatum***

Switchgrass is another taller grass reaching up to 10 feet tall. It has bright yellow foliage in the fall. There are some shorter varieties such as 'Prairie Dog' that only get about 4 feet tall.

### **Pink Muhly grass / *Muhlenbergia capillaris***

This showstopper puts out beautiful pink plumes in the fall. It gets about 2-3 feet tall and you can find other *Muhlenbergia* species in white and green as well.

Do some research to find what grass, sedge, or rush will fit your conditions (sun/shade, wet/dry, etc). Also, come see how we have used native grasses in our landscaping at the Memphis Botanic Garden! You can find some examples in the Arboretum, My Big Backyard, and the Woodland. Happy fall!



## **Adam's Favorite Fall Trees**

*By Adam Gann, Sensory Garden Horticulturist*

Fall is my favorite time of the year at the Garden. I love trees all year round, but autumn is really their time to shine! I'd like to take you on a quick tour of some of my favorite fall trees, what they look like, and how you can find them yourselves. Let's get started!

The first tree on my list is the big *Quercus phellos* (Willow Oak) to the south of Four

Seasons Court. As you walk out of the Visitors Center and come to the large fountain, take a right, and you can't miss it. Memphis is one of the last cities in the US to experience peak color and Willow Oaks are the last trees to put on a show here. They look their best in the first couple of weeks of December! Their leaves have a beautiful bronze shine to them. I understand living for the super bright colored trees, but don't pass over these understated giants. As their leaves start to fall, their thin Weeping Willow-like leaves create a thin veneer that provides one with color and a preview of the intricate winter structure of the tree.



Now moving on towards the Woodland and across from the entrance of the Herb Garden you will see a small, but mighty, *Oxydendrum arboreum* (Sourwood). The stunning red, orange, and purple leaves droop down and stretch out to provide a wonderful structure and long-lasting display of color. You can ID them by their elliptical-shaped leaves that are 4 to 7 inches long with fine teeth along the edge. Crush the leaves to get a distinctively sour scent, giving this tree its common name.

Making our way through the Woodland towards the Japanese Garden, there is a big and shapely *Ulmus americana* (American Elm) right off the path next to the statue of the little girl. When its color peaks it has my favorite hue of yellow especially against some of the other colors on the Woodland edge. Its super cool oval leaves can be ID'd by their doubly serrated edge and asymmetrical base where it meets the stem.

As you make your way across Koi Crossing you'll find two fall color heroes. The *Nyssa sylvatica* (Black Gum) on the left and a *Taxodium distichum* (Bald Cypress) which is in the water on the left. The Black Gum leaves are alternate, simple, oval-elliptical, and lack teeth. They turn bright red and are some of the first trees to turn. The Bald Cypress is one of the most incredible trees ever. Its leaves turn tan, cinnamon, and fiery orange. These deciduous conifers can be ID'd by their alternating needles and of course, their signature knees popping out of the ground and water.

Now we come to my favorite spot in the Garden for trees. The Shade Gardens have an impressive canopy made up of mostly oak trees. Walking along the creek going towards the Blecken Pavilion you will come upon a large *Carya glabra* (Pignut Hickory). It's the one with the five-leaflet compound leaves. You don't have to be right next to this tree to enjoy its lovely shade of gold leaves. Step 100 feet back to take in the three tiers of leaves that give this giant a cloud-like effect. I also must mention that starting in November, as the sun sets earlier and gets lower in the horizon, an amazing light show starts at the hour of four. All of the tallest tree tops will be illuminated by the sun and will have a golden bronze globe effect that is breathtaking. I recommend slowing your pace and looking up to take it all in.



As we come to the Blecken, we come to a *Fraxinus americana* (White Ash). If you're looking at the pavilion, it will be on your right. It has striking yellow, maroon, reddish-purple, and deep purple leaves. Its leaves are opposite, compound leaves with five to nine leaflets but usually seven. There is also another White Ash right next to the lake in the Radians Amphitheater.

These are just some of my favorite trees at the Garden. There are too many to name in one Vine Line, so I will leave you with these for now. I hope you will take the time to discover these trees and find some of your own fall favorites. Happy leaf peeping!

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## Preparing Your Rose Garden for Winter

*By Joey Mayes, Rose Garden Horticulturist*

Now that fall has *finally* arrived it's a great time to start preparing your roses and rose beds for whatever Mid-South weather bombards us with this winter. While roses need a little more attention and care than most landscape shrubs, being prepared will help create the best chance of success for growing healthy, strong, beautifully blooming roses.

Before we get into the deep stuff let's discuss some basics in regards to water requirements for roses. During the spring and summer growing seasons remember that *established* rosebeds need approximately one inch of water per week (less with rain). This roughly translates to just over a half gallon of water per sq ft in a garden bed. If you're only watering individual plants keep it to about a half gallon per plant per week (sounds crazy, I know!).

For new roses (planted less than one year) give them a light watering twice a week and a deep soak about once a month. During hotter months like July/August add another day of light watering. Roses prefer to be watered at their base so be mindful of your irrigation systems and where they spray.



When fall temperatures are consistently in the low 80s and high 70s it's wise to reduce watering to about every other week for two main reasons:

1) with cooler temperatures (soil temperature included) the plant doesn't have to work as hard to keep itself hydrated, and similar to spring the energy of the plant goes into root, stem, and bloom production; 2) with less daylight, rose plants have less time to produce chlorophyll. When a rose is overwatered you'll see the foliage on the lower part of the plant turn yellow. While the yellowing leaf

isn't problematic it does weaken the leaf and can create an excellent environment for blackspot to grow. When you see blackspot appear (you will, don't be scared) the affected

leaves will ultimately end up underneath the plant. Take the time to clean those up now as a preventative against future blackspot infestations. Always remember with roses, more water means more problems.

Our second step in preparation for the colder months is pruning. The main purpose of fall pruning is to keep our plants safe from harsh storms. Keep your pruners clean and sharp. At this time of year you'll really only want to prune out canes that cross through the center mass of the plant, canes that produce a stem with no bud set. Allowing for better airflow through your plant keeps fungus at bay and allows more light down into the center of the plant. This applies to new and established roses. If you have taller rose types like grandifloras and hybrid teas it's okay to take a foot or so off the top of the plant to keep stems and canes from breaking in windstorms, called "windtopping."

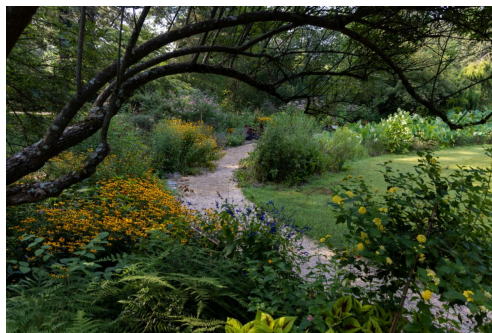
One of the initial reasons humans cultivated the rose was to harvest the hip for medicinal purposes. If you want to see the hips form on your rose, let the petals fall off the flowers naturally and leave the calyx. Generally, you will see hips will turn yellow, red, and orange. Rose hips provide a nice splash of fall color to offset our dreary winter weather.



With the top half of our rose now prepared we'll now get down into the dirt. Fall is an excellent time to amend the soil in your rosebed. The first and most basic step is a pH test throughout your beds. If you've only got a few roses, take a soil sample from around the dripline about 6-8 inches deep (scrape the mulch away first). Roses want soil pH *slightly* acidic so our goal is about 6.5 on the pH scale. If you find your soil is more acidic (6.5 or less) it's ok to add lime, be sure to always follow the instructions on the product you're using. Lime is most effective when worked into the soil.

Once we have our pH corrected we can add other amendments, such as gypsum, as it helps keep clay separated and is a good source of calcium and sulfur. After we've amended the soil, add a fertilizer with low nitrogen content. I prefer a compost-based fertilizer such as "Rose Tone" by Espoma. This type of fertilizer needs to be worked a few inches into the soil. You'll want to avoid nitrogen in fall and winter since using a high-nitrogen fertilizer will encourage the plant to produce new stems and foliage that will ultimately wilt and blacken as temperatures get colder. We, instead, want our roses to develop good, strong, complex root systems so they can develop good, strong canes to produce big, beautiful, fragrant roses next spring.

Now, and finally, the next best step is to sit back, relax, and wait because all your hard work is going to pay off in the armloads of roses you've grown. Good Luck!



Something you want to learn more about?  
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