

## MAXIMIZING FALL COLOR AT HOME With Art-Based Theory

“All colors are the friends of their neighbors and the lovers of their opposites.” — Marc Chagall, (1887-1985) artist, speaking of the color wheel.



Create your own showcase of fall colors with concepts from the art world. Like great paintings that use contrast, complimentary colors and textures to accentuate the canvas—in a yard setting, that lonely but lovely solitary tree, when paired with others—becomes a masterpiece, especially as fall colors arrive.

“We often get calls on what is good to plant,” says DNR urban

forest coordinator Emma Hanigan. “Everyone wants maple trees. Personally, I see beauty in all fall color—that’s what makes fall a wonderful time of year.” For Hanigan, helping homeowners diversify their trees not only enhances fall beauty, but creates a balanced urban forest. “We are trying to promote tree diversity through fall color selection,” she says,

mindful that when residents and communities heavily load the same tree species, disease outbreaks can be catastrophic.

### To create masterpieces of fall color:

**CONTRAST**—Warm colors contrast when set against cool, green foliage. Contrast accentuates colors, makes them more vibrant so they really pop





### How to Buy Uncommon Trees

Most big box stores and nurseries sell common, high demand trees, catering to public demand. The homeowner's affinity towards maples has led to a glut of the oft-planted tree. About 40 percent of Iowa's street trees are maples—and that poses risks. "We shouldn't put all of our chips on maples," or any tree in disproportionate numbers, says Emma Hanigan, DNR urban forestry coordinator. "Too many of one species spells potential disaster for disease outbreak and catastrophic tree losses. We want a mix of trees for contrasting colors, textures, aesthetics and forest health."

Contact your nursery to order lesser-sold trees. Several times a year, nurseries order stock from growers and they can obtain the trees. But try to order early, or order this fall to plant in the spring, she advises. Patience after all, is a virtue, especially with long-lived trees. But beauty is the reward.

visually. They are opposites on the color wheel, or complimentary colors, which are most pleasing to the eye. In essence, they bring out the best in each other. Colors next to each other on the color wheel are also pleasing to the eye, which helps define why the reds, oranges and yellows of fall paired together are striking.

Placed near each other, they accentuate and build upon each other.

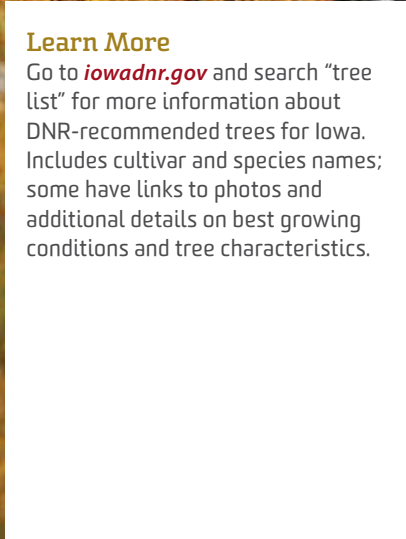
A maple tree in fall, while beautiful, is made all the more dramatic by other trees or shrubbery that may hold onto green leaves while the maple is aflame in red. Again, red and green are opposite on the color wheel, a balance of complimentary colors.

**TEXTURE**—Different trees have varying leaf shapes, heights, bark colorations, leaf surfaces and fall

colors that make yardscapes more visually appealing with depth, shape, form and tone.

**LONGEVITY**—With variations in plantings, a homeowner benefits from colors changing over time. "We do this in gardens, with early spring bulbs and flowers that bloom all summer," she says. Then fall mums round out the year. The same can be





### Learn More

Go to [iowadnr.gov](http://iowadnr.gov) and search "tree list" for more information about DNR-recommended trees for Iowa. Includes cultivar and species names; some have links to photos and additional details on best growing conditions and tree characteristics.



### Be Shovel Ready

Fall is great for tree planting. Operation ReLeaf and Plant Some Shade are two residential tree programs offering high quality trees at reduced prices. Alliant Energy's Operation ReLeaf offers 3- to 8-foot trees for \$25. ([alliantenergy.com/releaf](http://alliantenergy.com/releaf) or call Laura Wagner at 515-281-6749). MidAmerican Energy customers can purchase trees through Plant Some Shade for \$30 ([midamericanenergy.com/iowa\\_plantsomeshade](http://midamericanenergy.com/iowa_plantsomeshade) or 800-434-4017).





### Suggested Pairings for Contrast, Texture and Color that Last

Serviceberry with blackgum and bur oak will provide variety in height and shape. Each will enhance the other. Bur oak provides cool greens while the other species are in color and will turn color last. Serviceberry adds understory color beneath the oak. And the medium-height blackgum with its pyramidal shape will add texture and brilliant deep reds to burgundy colors.

Pairing white oak and honey locust with dogwood or redbud underneath will yield different timing to fall colors. Honey locust offers warm, yellow fall colors first, enhanced by the cool green foliage of dogwood or redbud. Dogwood changes next, from green to orange to red, and the white oak will finish off with its deep purple to brown colors and its leaves will last the longest.



done with fall color. “One can prolong the fall color season.” The key is selections of trees and shrubs that change colors early-, mid- and late-fall. When they turn at different rates, color is prolonged and the desired warm and cool opposites exist.

### Suggested Tree Pairings

Many homes may have one tree. Use these suggested pairings to enhance fall color. For example, an existing tree with yellow or orange fall foliage would benefit with a Norway maple planted nearby to add deep reds.

The goal should be to strive for four categories, says Hanigan:

**COOL GREENS**—Trees that hold their greenery while nearby trees are

ablaze in color add contrast. Bur oaks retain green leaves quite late, providing a cool contrast to warm fall colors. Conifers are an obvious choice, too. She advises avoiding blue spruce—too many disease issues—and suggests Norway spruce, white pine or concolor fir instead.

**DAB THE YELLOW PALETTE**—For homes lacking warm, yellow fall colors, consider ginkgo, honey locust or London planetree. The DNR-recommended ginkgos listed online are male cultivars—devoid of the smelly fruits which many homeowners find unpleasant.

**ORANGES**—For yards lacking orange colors, add a clump serviceberry

shrub. The plant delights with spring flowers and in June, berries for birds.

**DEEP REDS**—Add red or white oak, blackgum or musclewood for a smack of red. Blackgum gives texture all year with its smooth, glossy leaves that turn brilliant red-orange to burgundy. Its small berries provide an important fuel for migrating fall birds. Musclewood (American hornbeam, *Carpinus caroliniana*) also adds texture with the unusual, rippled bark with grey to blue undertones that provides visual texture in winter. As a small, understory tree native to Iowa woodlands, it is uncommon in yard settings and perfect for limited space and creating privacy in yards.