

# Beyond mums and asters for the fall season

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Beginning in late summer, our garden centers start to offer some beautiful mums and asters and an occasional "Autumn Joy" sedum or hybrid black-eyed-Susan. I particularly like the asters because not only do they usually return in my garden, but, in addition, they are derived from native species. Beyond the mums and asters, there are many other good garden plants that have not only good color but also fragrance.

The crocus that bloom in the fall include many species in two genera, the true fall-flowering crocus (*Crocus*) and the poisonous autumn crocus (*Colchicum*). Both flower in shades of pink or white with leaves that mature the following spring. Saffron (*Crocus sativus*) blooms at this time with tiny orange stigmas that can be harvested from your garden and dried for later use. The Pennsylvania Germans, especially the Moravians, made a small cottage industry of saffron in Colonial America.

There are a number of iris that bloom twice or even a third time. The Reblooming Iris Society, a section of the American Iris Society, provides a Web page: <http://www.rebloomingiris.com/>. Click on "Gallery" for a list of cultivars and "Links" for a list of nurseries.

Above all, we can't forget the multitudes of goldenrods (almost all native species and their hybrids) that are now available.

## Garden Tales

I particularly like "Fireworks" for its perky flowers that literally explode in the border. Sweet goldenrod (*S. odora*) is the state herb (<http://portal.delaware.gov/delfacts/plant.shtml>) and scented of French tarragon. No! Goldenrods do not cause hay fever (unless you persist in stuffing the flowers up your nose).

For fragrance in the fall, I wouldn't be without Fruitland autumn olive (*Elaeagnus 'Fruitlandii'*). Starting in September, the tiny, inconspicuous flowers release a cloud of spicy vanilla fragrance that carries up to six feet away. I have this planted near our back door, and because the fragrance carries so far from the flowers, people always ask "What smells so good?"

Fruitland autumn olive was introduced by the late Fruitland Nursery near Princess Anne, Md. It is rapidly growing to about 15 feet with gray leaves and long, arching branches that make a good screen and wildlife cover (and are great for basket weaving). Some might object to this autumn olive because of its notorious invasive cousin, autumn olive (*E. angustifolia*), but while the fruits are abundant (and eaten by birds); hopefully it will remain contained, but I have plants for 30 years now, and it seems to be behaving itself.

Another fragrant delight in the fall is the



Wikipedia.com photo

**Oriental bittersweet has round leaves and fruits along the stems. Avoid this noxious, invasive species and look, instead, for the American bittersweet, which has lance-shaped leaves and fruits at the tips.**

Japanese katsura-tree (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*). I always enjoy delighting visitors by asking them to pick up the freshly fallen leaves and cup them in their hands; the fragrance is definitely that of strawberries.

For decorative fruits in the fall, bitter-sweet is so typical. However, be sure to avoid the invasive Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*), which has round leaves and fruits along the stems. You will invariably find Oriental bittersweet offered by many garden centers in the fall, but don't purchase it; you will only help the propagation of this noxious species which has crowded out our American native bittersweet (*C. scandens*), which has lance-shaped leaves and fruits mostly at the tips of the stems. If you plant American bittersweet in your garden, plant both male and female plants (it is dioecious) and in a spot where you don't mind the persistent surface roots that produce a multitude of new leafy shoots.

For an excellent publication, "Mistaken Identity," that discusses similar plant species, such as the Oriental and American bittersweet, you can request a copy from one of the co-authors, Ms. Amanda Treher ([amanda.treher@gmail.com](mailto:amanda.treher@gmail.com)) or stop by the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium.

*Editor's note: On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call (302) 857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the herbarium, and call (302) 857-6408 (Dr. Arthur Tucker) for more information about this article.*