

# Landscape DESIGN

## A GLORIOUS LAST HURRAH!

## YOUR GARDEN FROM LABOR DAY AND BEYOND

**BY RUTH ROGERS CLAUSEN**

**T**he gardening season is winding down in many parts of the country, but that is no reason to put the tools and enthusiasm away. You might want to do a little trimming and cleaning up, but there are still plenty of late-blooming perennials and berry producing shrubs to decorate your landscape.

### Flowers

Montauk or Nippon daisy (*Nipponanthemum nipponicum*) is one that really waits almost to the last minute to bloom. It is woody at the base, and if you don't prune it in spring, it can become quite tall with unsightly legs. The accompanying cinnamon-colored

heads of sedum 'Autumn Joy' will hold up well for several months depending upon zone and weather conditions. It may be well into the new year before you need to finally clean it up. In some regions, by then, you will already see new young shoots at the crown. Another fall winner is ajania, *Ajania pacifica* [*syn. Chrysanthemum pacificum*] with its frosty-rimmed foliage and bright yellow, button flower heads of bloom. These are attractive alongside late chrysanthemums well into fall. They also are good companions for hostas and echo the color of their dying foliage. Ornamental onions have become all the







◀ **LEFT:** Low-growing cyclamen; **RIGHT:** 'Lilac Wonder'

rage recently. *Allium thunbergii* 'Ozawa' and *A. t.* 'Album' start to bud in late August in Zone 6, and by early September start to show color. By this time, the triangular grassy leaves have started to turn orange. The purplish flowers dry and remain on the plant through cold weather and even light snow; they have decorated my holiday table on more than one occasion. The white form is less robust, but equally beautiful.

### Bulbs

We are all familiar with the bulbs of spring, but fall blooming ones often bring a new dimension to autumn gardens. Low growing cyclamen, both *C. hederifolium* and *C. coum* bring color to shaded areas, especially under deciduous trees, and decorate the ground for several months with their intricately marked leaves. Try colchicums, too.

Sometimes mistakenly called autumn crocus, they bloom at the same time and are often called "naked ladies," since their foliage appears in spring. *Colchicum* 'Lilac Wonder' is popular, as is white *Colchicum speciosum* 'Album.'

### Seed heads

When cleaning up in fall, don't be too diligent. Many seed heads not only offer architectural interest, but provide food for seed-eating birds and cover for those who spend the winter. Purple coneflowers bloom from mid-summer through fall and provide pollen and nectar for numerous butterfly species including red admirals, black swallowtails and silver-spotted red skippers. Hummers and plenty of insects are frequent visitors. The prickly gray heads of sea holly provide an architectural foil for the late flower clusters of native blue mistflower or perennial ageratum (*Conoclinium coelestinum*). It is a source of nectar for many insects, but especially for late migrating butterflies including monarchs.

### Ornamental grasses

Ornamental grasses come into their own as nights cool. Bold *Miscanthus* plumes play off against rusty smokebush (*Cotinus coggygria*) foliage in Central Park, New York City, N.Y. Be aware that *Miscanthus* species, sometimes called eulalia grass, garner a bad reputation for seeding about and becoming invasive. Check with your local co-op extension office to determine if these beauties are



◀ **LEFT:** *Ajania*; **TOP CENTER:** Montauk or Nippon daisy; **BOTTOM CENTER:** *Allium* 'Album'; **RIGHT:** *Allium* 'Ozawa'





▲ Miscanthus with Rusty smokebush

a problem in your area. When planning your garden, it is wise to think about how your design will play later in the year, after bloom time. Always consider possible shrubs and perennials. Arkansas bluestar (*Amsonia hubrechtii*) with its fine, delicate foliage and golden fall finery, creates a striking picture when combined with dwarf blue spruce. Later, the brilliant gold bluestar leaves darken, but provide an effective background for the cottony seed heads of Japanese anemones.

### Fruiting shrubs

Beach rose (*Rosa rugosa*), is found growing wild on many beaches around the U.S., but also is grown as an ornamental, especially as its perfume is sublime, and it is seldom browsed by deer. Bloom may continue during mild

weather well into fall, at which time it is also laden with brightly colored fruits or hips. These are not only attractive, but provide needed food for birds and mammals. It has good disease resistance, but tends to sucker, which may not work well in small gardens. Beach roses are excellent as a spiny screen or hedge plant, especially in coastal regions.

Native Eastern winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) is certainly a star of the fall and winter scene. Even before it drops leaves, the berries are bright and shiny to attract birds. Since the plants are separate male and female, you will need at least a single male to pollinate a dozen or so females to enjoy a crop of berries. Cultivars often are named to indicate their sex as in 'Rhett Butler,' that pollinates 'Scarlett O'Hara!' There are many cultivars available, some with yellow berries. Cut, berried branches have become popular items for holiday pots and indoor decorations. Pruning will result in the loss of flowering and berries, so only do so to shape a specimen. At the front of the bed, late-blooming smooth asters *Symphotrichum oblongifolium* 'October Skies' remain colorful.

In late summer going into fall, deciduous tea viburnum (*Viburnum*





*setigerum*) carries heavy drooping clusters of orange red fruit. Among the best of the viburnums for fruiting, it grows to 12 feet or so tall when mature. The bluish-green foliage colors pale orange in fall. Formerly it was made into a tea. It is always a surprise when the berries of beauty bush (*Callicarpa dichotoma*) from Asia color up. Small, brilliant purple berries follow rather insignificant pink flowers earlier in the year. Unfortunately, deer are quite fond of both this species, and its handsome cousin American beauty bush (*C. americana*).

### Combos

Combinations of plants that are good-looking during the waning of the year attract attention even when there is little color from flowers or berries. The gray, twisted stems of Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) act as a veil



◀ LEFT TO RIGHT: Beauty Bush, Deciduous tea viburnum, Eastern native winterberry, Beach Rose.

for the reddish oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) behind. Miscanthus grass provides height and its plumes provide a color echo for the Russian sage.

Even in winter, there are interesting vignettes that amuse the diligent gardener. In December at the United States National Arboretum in Washington D.C., evergreen native Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) makes a fine contrast and companion for Allegheny spurge (*Pachysandra procumbens*). The latter is not evergreen except in mild zones, but is an underused herbaceous perennial groundcover, perfect for native plant or wild gardens. It spreads by rhizomes. Young foliage is mottled. In spring, it blooms with showy spikes of fragrant, pinkish white flowers.

So, remember that gardens need tending from New Year's Day to New Year's Eve. You'll benefit from every moment of it. ■

### Photos by Ruth Rogers Clausen



Ruth Rogers Clausen was trained in horticulture in the U.K. and has been in the in-



▲ TOP: Russian sage with oakleaf hydrangea; BOTTOM: Christmas fern and Allegheny spurge

dustry for more than 60 years. She is the author of several gardening books, including the 2015 "Essential Perennials," co-authored with Thomas Christopher. She also is a popular lecturer. Clausen served as horticulture editor for "Country Living Gardener" for more than seven years. Currently, she writes the "Plantings" column for "Country Gardens" magazine. In 2017, Clausen received the Garden Media Award from the Perennial Plant Association. She is a member of the Corporation for the New York Botanical Garden and is on the Board of Directors for Delaware Botanic Gardens @ Pepper Creek in southern Delaware.