



PLANTS FOR ALL SEASONS

In selecting plantings for your gardens, I always suggest species that have attractive qualities in more than one season. Fall color is something I look forward to each year, but wish it were more quickly followed by spring. I would like to suggest two plants, one flowering perennial and one tree, that are spectacular in Fall, but have outstanding winter interest, too.

A sure sign of Fall is the Goldenrods' (Solidago spp.) glorious sprays of yellow flowers covering grassy meadows and roadsides. For those who prefer warm Fall reds, a favorite is the brilliant crimson foliage of the Staghorn Sumac tree (Rhus typhina.)



Despite the common perception that Goldenrods irritate allergies, it is a myth. The Goldenrod is insect- pollinated, while allergy symptoms are more often caused by plants that produce airborne pollen carried by wind. Ragweed (Ambrosia spp.) blooms when Goldenrod does, and grows in similar sites,

therefore the source of the seasonally annoying airborne Ragweed pollen, is mistakenly thought to be Goldenrod.

There are about 60 species of native Goldenrod found in the East Coast of the United States. Some grow tall, some are ground covers, but all produce the characteristic yellow flowers in late summer and fall. As the seeds ripen in Fall, they are a food source for Tufted Titmouse, American Goldfinches, and Black-capped Chickadees. After the frost, the Goldenrods continue to have great value to birds because of the galls formed on the stems.

The Goldenrod stem galls start in summer when parasitic flies, harmless to humans, lay eggs. The larvae hatch over the winter and burrow in the stem to hibernate. This causes a fleshy gall to form. Downy Woodpeckers and Black-capped Chickadees are opportunistic and readily fed on the insect larvae hiding in the galls. These dormant, drying stems wave in the breeze and provide interesting texture for winter meadows.



Yellow Springs Farm

NATIVE PLANTS NURSERY

Staghorn Sumac is gaining popularity with home gardeners because of its modest size, tolerance for sunny, dry sites with poor soils, and exceptional fall color. Mature trees can reach 15-20 feet tall, but in poorer soils might remain large shrubs, only 6-8 feet tall. The red fruit clusters on the Sumac form in summer, but are too sour for humans' taste. They are not a preferred food source even for birds when the selection of edibles is vast. Birds usually prefer Hawthorn fruit, Arrowwood Viburnum and Grey Dogwood berries in fall. Then, the Sumac fruit dries in attractive cone-shaped clusters called "bobs." As winter sets in, the dried clusters add interest to the dreary landscape and become an important food source for birds such as American Robins, Eastern Bluebirds, Cardinals, Red-eyed Vireo, Thrushes, Catbirds, and Dark-eyed Juncos. Check to see which of these species overwinter in Pa vs. migrates



Both Goldenrod and Staghorn Sumac offer aesthetic features and important food sources for birds all winter long. When plants are dormant during winter, it is especially nice to see birds foraging and flitting outside the window, reminding me that nature is alive and well even though spring is months away.