



Patriotic Gardens: Red, White, and Blue in Fall and Winter Gardens

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A Statewide Garden Theme

Virginia Cooperative Extension developed five America’s Anniversary Garden™ publications in 2007 to help individuals, communities, and groups mark America’s 400th Anniversary with a signature garden planting. The signature gardens have red, white, and blue color schemes. In 2026, the publications were reviewed and revised to help individuals, communities, and groups mark America’s Semiquincentennial. These publications are useful for creating patriotic-themed gardens.

The Challenge of Fall and Winter Garden Color

Spring and summer gardens are easy to plan, regardless of color scheme, because thousands of annual and perennial flower species and cultivars bloom during those seasons. Designing color into fall and winter gardens isn’t as easy because fewer flowers are available that can survive cold temperatures.

Fall and winter garden color relies heavily on the leaves, fruit, and bark of woody plants. A tree or shrub already in your garden may have red fall leaf color, red berries in the winter or white or red bark that is pretty when the leaves drop off. If not, you can add some of these plants, along with other red, white, and blue annuals, perennials, and bulbs, in front of or underneath the trees and shrubs to create a patriotic garden. Many plant options are listed below and in the other publications in the Patriotic Garden series.



Figure 1: This Patriotic Garden will have a combination of annual red, white, and blue pansies and permanent woody landscape plants (red twig dogwood and deciduous holly).

Perennial Flowers for Fall: Red, White, and Blue Color

For fall (until hard frost/freeze), several herbaceous perennials can provide late-season color. All are hardy across Virginia and work well in mixed plantings.



Figure 2: The red berries on a deciduous holly serve as the background for a bed of blue and white pansies.

Asters dominate the late-autumn perennial border, and many native species and hybrids are suitable for the **Patriotic Garden** color motif. White wood aster (*Aster divaricatus*) is a tough native perennial with metallic, deep green foliage and sparkling white autumn flowers, best used in part shade. *Aster azureus*, the sky-blue aster, blooms deep blue. There are several cultivars of *Aster novae-angliae* (New England aster) with clean white flowers, including ‘Lyon’s White’ and ‘Wedding Lace.’ Of the hundreds of cultivars of New York asters (*Aster novi-belgii*) available, there are true crimson reds (‘Alert,’ ‘Crimson Brocade,’ ‘The Bishop,’ and ‘Royal Ruby’) and blues (‘Lady in Blue,’ ‘Buxton’s Blue,’ and ‘Climax’). *Aster tataricus*, the tatarian daisy, is non-native but definitely garden worthy. This is one of the latest blooming asters (October and November), tolerant of light frost, and perfect if you don’t mind a touch of violet in your blue.

Leadwort (*Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*) is a tough but beautiful ground cover with royal blue flowers throughout the summer and fall. A bonus of leadwort is that, once the temperatures dip in autumn, the foliage turns red-bronze. Hybrid anemone (*Anemone × hybrida* ‘Honorine Jobert’) sports white poppy-like flowers atop tall, wiry stems. “Hardy” fall-blooming mums (*Chrysanthemum* hybrids) are available in deep red and creamy white, but be aware that many mums sold as “hardy” may not come back next year and are best treated as a one-time color boost for autumn.

Annual Flowers for Fall: Red, White, and Blue Color

If you plan to transition your fall and winter garden to a spring-bulb garden, locate and plant your fall and winter annuals and bulbs at the same time. After they flower in the spring, your bulbs can stay in place, and your winter annuals can be replaced with red, white, and blue summer annuals to produce a seasonal color transition in the same garden or landscape bed.

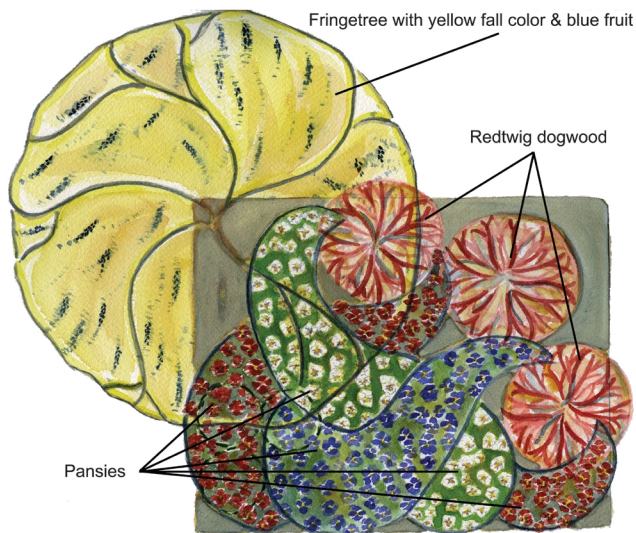


Figure 3: This small landscape design (from Patriotic Gardens: Bulbs for a Red, White, and Blue Spring Garden) has pansies in the locations where summer annuals can be transitioned in after the pansies finish blooming.

Both pansies (*Viola × wittrockiana*) and violas (*Viola × cornuta*) are perfect for cool-season color in the late fall, winter, and early spring. As with many annuals, seed companies market pansies and violas not as individual cultivars, but as “series.” A series is a group of plants selected for similar habits and growing qualities, but not necessarily genetically related. Nearly every pansy series has red, white, and blue options. For example, a widely grown, well-performing series is the Delta hybrids, available in clear red, white, and blue. For those who like a “face” or darker blotch on their pansies, there’s the Delta Spirit Mix, red with blotch, blue with blotch, and solid white.





Figures 4 and 5: Red, white, and blue pansies can be used in the landscape and in containers.

You can also plan ahead and combine fall and winter pansies with late-winter or early-spring blooming bulbs. Seed trials across the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic have shown that smaller-flowered viola hybrids (often called Johnny jump-ups) are more weather resistant and cold tolerant than large-flowered pansies. Two popular series of violas are the Sorbet hybrids and the Penny hybrids – both have several blue and white selections, and at least one red. Penny’s White, Deep Blue, and Red Blotch make a great combination, as do Sorbet’s Coconut and Blue Ice (there is no scarlet or red in the Sorbet series).



Figure 6: This combination planting features blue fall and winter pansies, early-spring red tulips, and white daffodils.

Ornamental kale and cabbage (*Brassica oleracea* hybrids) thrive in cool weather and add texture and novelty to winter color plantings. The Color-up and Osaka series of ornamental cabbage feature red and creamy white selections, as do the Nagoya, Peacock, and Chidori hybrids of ornamental kale. Ornamental kale leaves are more feathery or rippled than those of cabbage, which is more compact. For the best garden performance, plant ornamental cabbages, which have

a more compact growth habit, and kales in the fall so they have time to become established before really cold weather.

Woody Plants for Red, White, and Blue Fall and Winter Color

Red is the easiest color to incorporate into a fall or winter garden because numerous plants have red fall foliage, red fruit, or red bark. Some of this red will be temporary, as with the leaves of deciduous trees, shrubs, and vines. Some fruits, however, tend to persist or hang on for most of the winter, and a few evergreens take on a reddish color in the fall and winter that continues until spring. The following lists include trees, shrubs, and vines with significant fall and/or winter color (* denotes native plants).

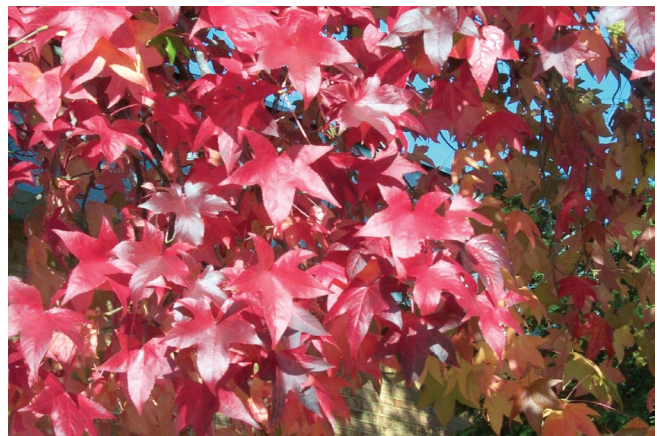


Figure 7: A red and purple fall color mixture on a sweet gum brightens the landscape.

Red Leaves

Trees

- Amur maple (*Acer ginnala*)
- red maple* (*Acer rubrum*)
- flowering dogwood* (*Cornus florida*)
- Chinese dogwood (*Cornus kousa*)
- black gum* (*Nyssa sylvatica*)
- sourwood* (*Oxydendrum arboretum*)
- scarlet oak* (*Quercus coccinea*)
- red oak* (*Quercus rubra*)
- southern red oak (*Quercus falcata*)

Other Trees With Red in Their Fall Color Mixture

American smoketree (*Cotinus obovatus*)
Franklinia (*Franklinia alatamaha*)
sweet gum* (*Liquidambar styraciflua*)
pin oak* (*Quercus palustris*)
sassafras* (*Sassafras albidum*)
zelkova (*Zelkova serrata*)



Figure 8: Purple-tinged red fall color on oakleaf hydrangea adds color.

Shrubs

red chokeberry* (*Aronia arbutifolia*)
red twig dogwood* (*Cornus sericea*)
witch hazel (*Hamamelis × intermedia* ‘Diane’)
oakleaf hydrangea* (*Hydrangea quercifolia*)
Virginia sweetspire* (*Itea virginica*)
shining sumac* (*Rhus copallina*)
staghorn sumac* (*R. typhina*)
high-bush blueberry* (*Vaccinium corymbosum*)
arrowwood viburnum* (*Viburnum dentatum*)
blackhaw viburnum* (*V. prunifolium*)
American cranberry bush viburnum* (*V. trilobum*)

Vines

Virginia creeper* (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)
Boston ivy (*P. tricuspidata*)



Figure 9: The hawthorn has persistent red fruit.

Red Fruits

Trees

Deciduous

serviceberry* (*Amelanchier spp.*)
flowering dogwood* (*Cornus florida*)
Chinese dogwood (*Cornus kousa*)
Cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas*)
hawthorns (*Crataegus spp.*)
crabapples (*Malus spp.*)

Evergreen

hollies (English – *Ilex aquifolium*, American – *I. opaca*, Foster – *I. × attenuata* ‘Fosteri’)

Shrubs

Deciduous

red chokeberry* (*Aronia arbutifolia*)
rockspray cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster horizontalis*)
deciduous hollies* (*Ilex decidua*, *I. verticillata*)
(note: need male and female plants to get berries)
shining sumac* (*Rhus copallina*)
staghorn sumac* (*R. typhina*)
rugose rose (*Rosa rugosa*)
European cranberry bush viburnum (*Viburnum opulus*)
American cranberry bush viburnum* (*V. trilobum*)

Evergreen

- cranberry cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster apiculatus*)
- bearberry cotoneaster (*C. dammeri*)
- willowleaf cotoneaster (*C. salicifolius*)
- Burford (Chinese) holly (*Ilex cornuta* ‘Burfordii’)
- yaupon holly* (*Ilex vomitoria*)
- pyracantha (*Pyracantha coccinea*)



Figure 10: A yaupon holly sporting red berries.

Red Bark

Trees

- coralbarb maple (*Acer palmatum* ‘Sango Kaku’, ‘Senkaki’)

Shrubs

- redtwig/redosier dogwood* (*Cornus alba*, *C. sericea*)
- Virginia sweetspire* (*Itea virginica*)
- high-bush blueberry* (*Vaccinium corymbosum*)



Figure 11: The redtwig dogwood has red bark.

Red Flowers

Shrubs

Deciduous

- witch hazel (*Hamamelis × intermedia* ‘Diane’)

Evergreen

- Japanese camellias (*Camellia japonica* – there are cold-hardy camellias for zones 6 and 7, not just for zone 8)



Figure 12: Japanese camellia cultivars offer red, white, red and white, and blue-edged red blooms.

White Bark and Flowers

While a prominent color in spring and summer gardens, white is a relatively rare color in fall and winter gardens. The best fall and winter white we can get is from the bark of birch trees. A few shrubs with white flowers bloom in the fall and winter. The native vine, virgin's-bower, produces huge displays of white flowers in the fall.

Trees

Paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*)

Asian white birch (*B. platphylla* var. *japonica*)

Shrubs

Evergreen

Japanese camellia (*Camellia japonica*)

Sasanqua camellia (*C. sasanqua*)

Deciduous

Fragrant wintersweet (*Chimonanthus praecox*)

Vines

Virgin's-bower* (*Clematis virginiana*)



Figure 13: The native vine virgin's-bower adds a very noticeable display of white flowers to fall gardens.

Blue leaves

Blue is a challenging color to add to the landscape at any time of year, but especially in the fall and winter. Only evergreen trees and shrubs have blue leaf color, with a few trees and shrubs also having blue fruits.

Trees

Evergreen

Atlas cedar (*Cedrus atlantic*)

Leyland cypress (× *Cupressocyparis leylandii* 'Naylor's Blue')

Rocky Mountain juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*, numerous cultivars)

Eastern red cedar* (*J. virginiana*, numerous cultivars)

Colorado blue spruce (*Picea pungens* var. *glauca*)



Figure 14: A "woody" Patriot Garden shows off the Colorado blue spruce's leaves (foreground), the deciduous holly's red berries, and the river birch's whitish bark (both background).

Shrubs

Evergreen

cultivars of numerous junipers (*Juniperus chinensis*, *J. conferta*, *J. horizontalis**, *J. squamata*)



Figure 15: The female fringetree has blue berries.

Trees

Deciduous

fringetree* (*Chionanthus virginicus*)

black gum* (*Nyssa sylvatica*)

Evergreen

eastern red cedar* (*Juniperus virginiana*)

Shrubs

Deciduous

arrowwood viburnum* (*Viburnum dentatum*)

nannyberry viburnum* (*V. lentago*)

Evergreen

cultivars of numerous junipers (*Juniperus chinensis*, *J. conferta*, *J. horizontalis*, *J. squamata*)

Vine

Boston ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*)

Virginia Creeper* (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)

(*denotes native plant)



Figure 16: Fall red foliage of Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*). Photo credit: Mark Sutphin, Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Other Publications in the Series

[Patriotic Gardens: How to Plant a Red, White and Blue Garden, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-210](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-210/426-210.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-210/426-210.html)

[Patriotic Gardens: Developing A Statewide Corridor and Entrance Enhancement Program, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-211](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-211/426-211.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-211/426-211.html)

[Patriotic Gardens: Bulbs for a Red, White, and Blue Spring Garden, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-220](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-220/426-220.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-220/426-220.html)

[Patriotic Gardens: Native Plants, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-223](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-223/426-223.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-223/426-223.html)

Additional Resources

[Annuals: Culture and Maintenance, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-200](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-200/426-200.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-200/426-200.html)

[Perennials: Culture, Maintenance and Propagation, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-203](https://ext.vt.edu/426/426-203/426-203.html), (ext.vt.edu/426/426-203/426-203.html)

[Tree and Shrub Planting Guidelines, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 430-295](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-295/430-295.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-295/430-295.html)

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