

# Architectural Accents

Preserve pieces of the past by turning salvaged cornices into elegant entry planters that showcase the season's best blooms.

Once the regal roosts of pigeons and gargoyles, cornices and decorative molding from the tops of dismantled old buildings are too pretty for the junk pile. But that's exactly what's become of much of our architectural ancestry. Many of the grand structures of a century or more ago have been demolished. Fortunately for those of us who love preserving the past, salvaged metal cornices are showing up in antiques shops and flea markets. We teamed up with artist Stephanie Brandenburg to build some classy containers to highlight their charms once again.

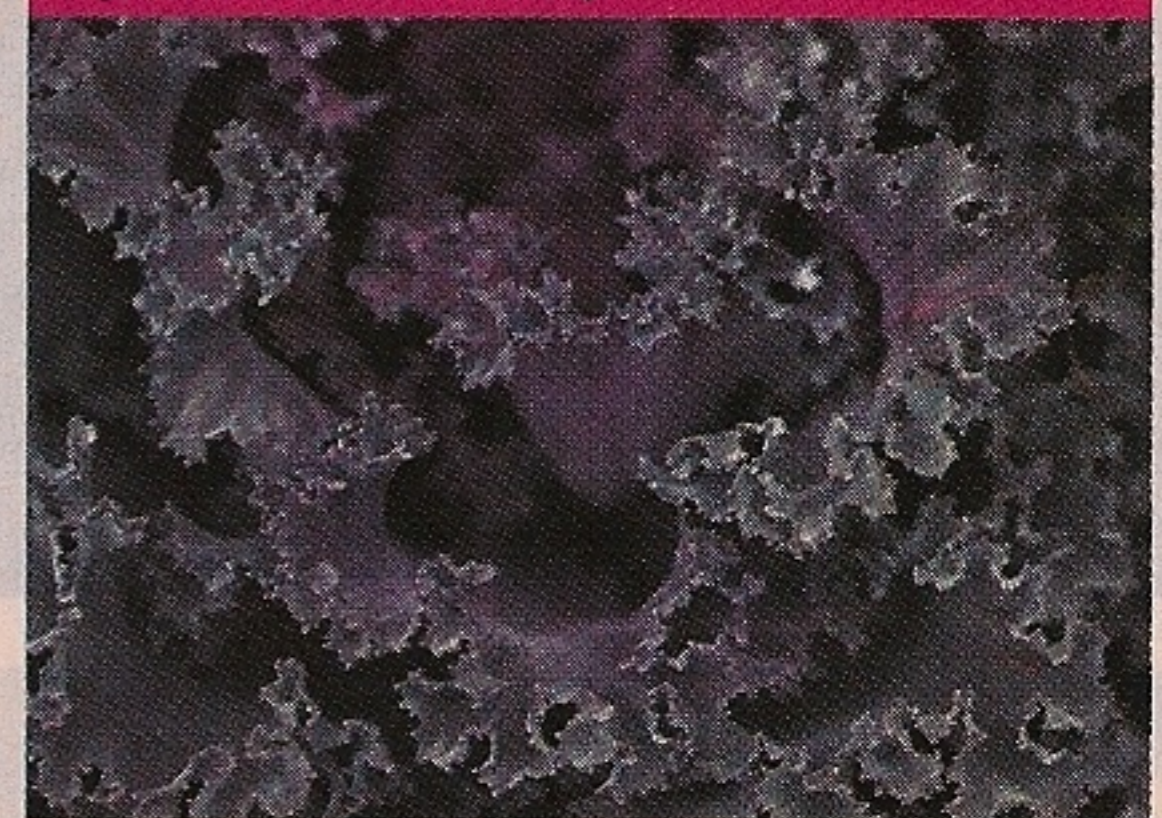
You don't have to be a metalworker to convert a cornice to a planter. All you need are a pair of tin snips, some wire, a screwdriver, and a few screws. Add potting soil and your favorite fall performers, and you're good to grow. Watering will be your only chore. These ideas will get you started.

For more information, see the Buyer's Guide on page 100.

## Corner the Drama

Bits of a cornice that once wrapped a stately old church, *opposite*, now serve as an ornate planter. Made by wiring two corner pieces together to form a box, this soil-filled shell sits atop a brick entry pillar for optimal viewing. The Issai beautyberry (*Callicarpa dichotoma* 'Issai') extends the length of the display with berried branches that persist into winter and attract birds. Filling in along the edges are purple-hued chrysanthemum, creeping wirevine (*Muehlenbeckia*), and ornamental cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*).

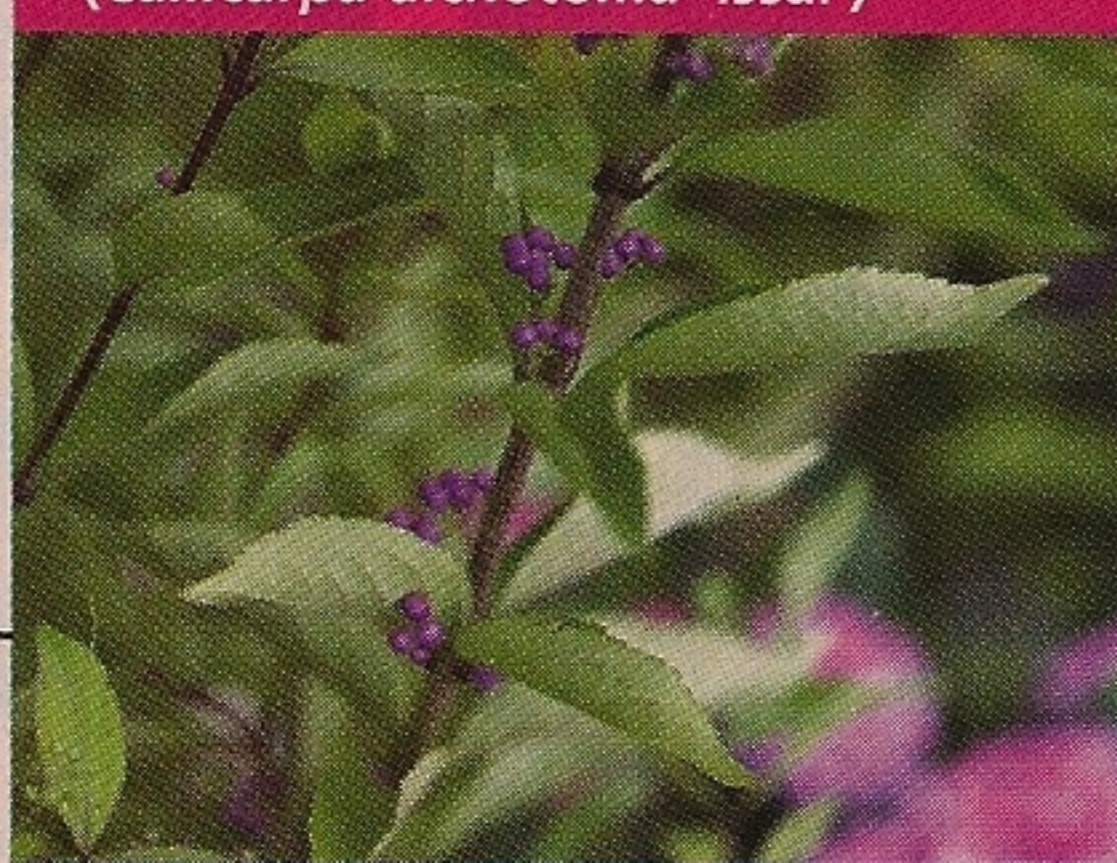
Ornamental cabbage  
(*Brassica oleracea*)



Chrysanthemum



Issai beautyberry  
(*Callicarpa dichotoma* 'Issai')



Creeping wirevine  
(*Muehlenbeckia*)





Sundaze Flame  
*Bracteantha bracteata*



Molten Lava *Oxalis vulcanicola*



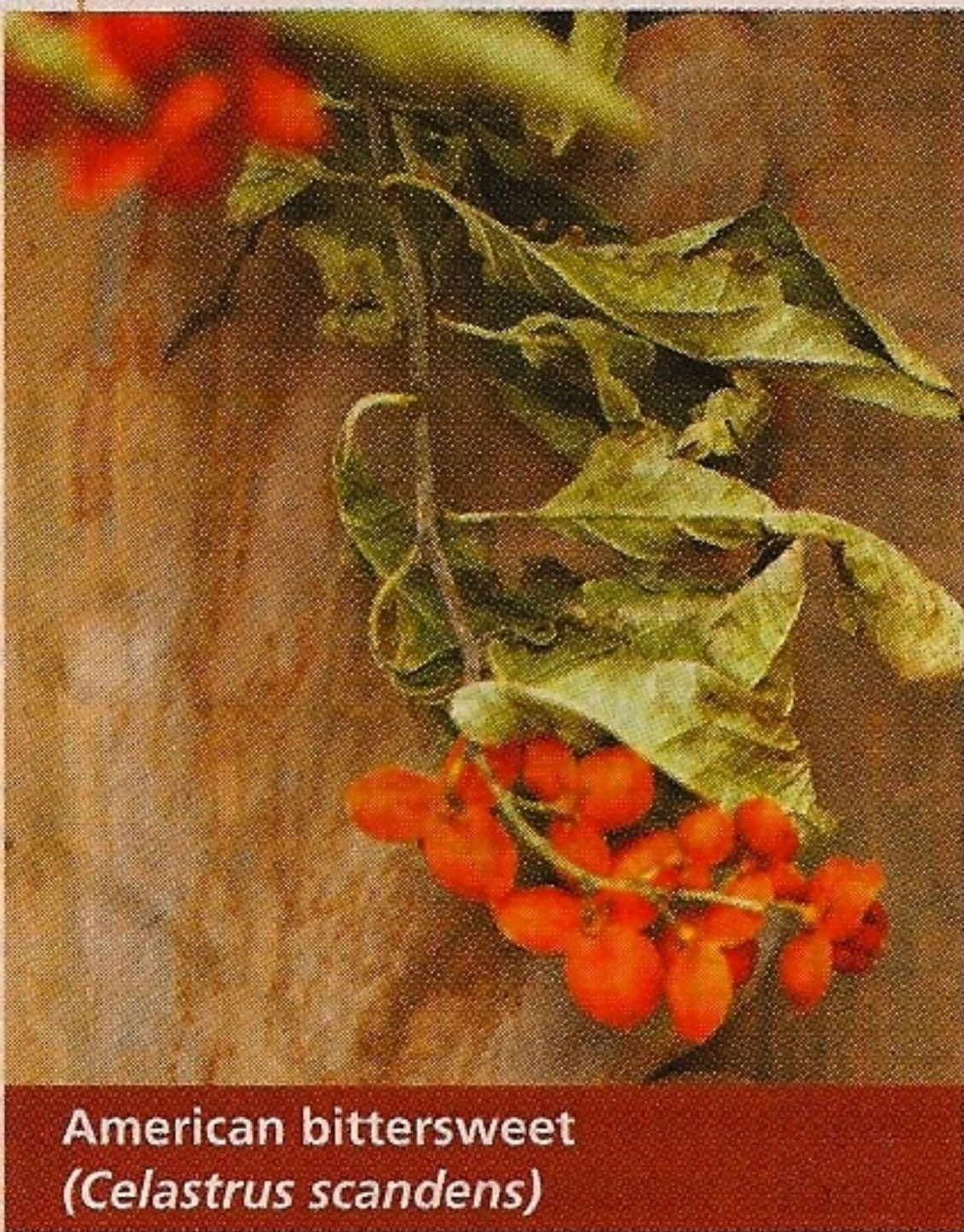
Snowstorm Giant Snowflake  
*bacopa (Sutera)*

## Give a Warm Welcome

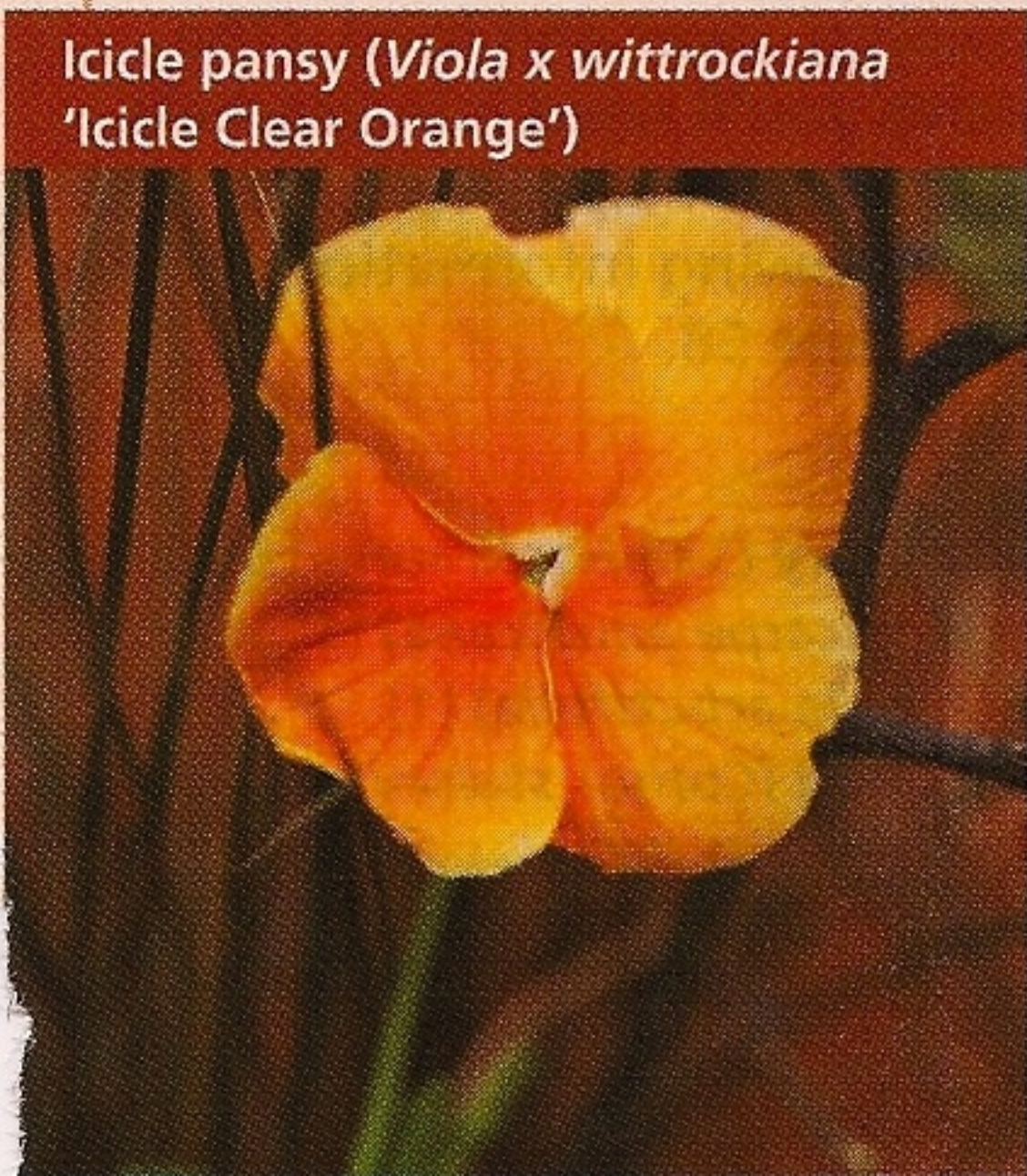
Autumn doesn't have to be all about winding down for the year. This dramatic door display ramps up the color with plants that seamlessly bridge the seasons. A combination of hot and cool hues pops from a circular opening cut into the front of this cornice, left to age to a subdued rusty brown patina. Complementing the golden door are Sundaze Flame *Bracteantha bracteata* and Molten Lava *Oxalis vulcanicola*. Brilliant sprays of Snowstorm Giant Snowflake *bacopa (Sutera)* fan the flames.

## Color Them Bittersweet

While no longer crowning tall buildings, these cornice sections still provide just the right architectural accent. The door-hung copper beauties hold clusters of grasses and flowers: Toffee Twist sedge (*Carex flagellifera* 'Toffee Twist'), Icicle pansy (*Viola x wittrockiana* 'Icicle Clear Orange'), and snapdragons. A branch of noninvasive American bittersweet weaves the two together. To protect the door from potting soil and moisture, line each cornice with plastic and take care not to overwater. ■



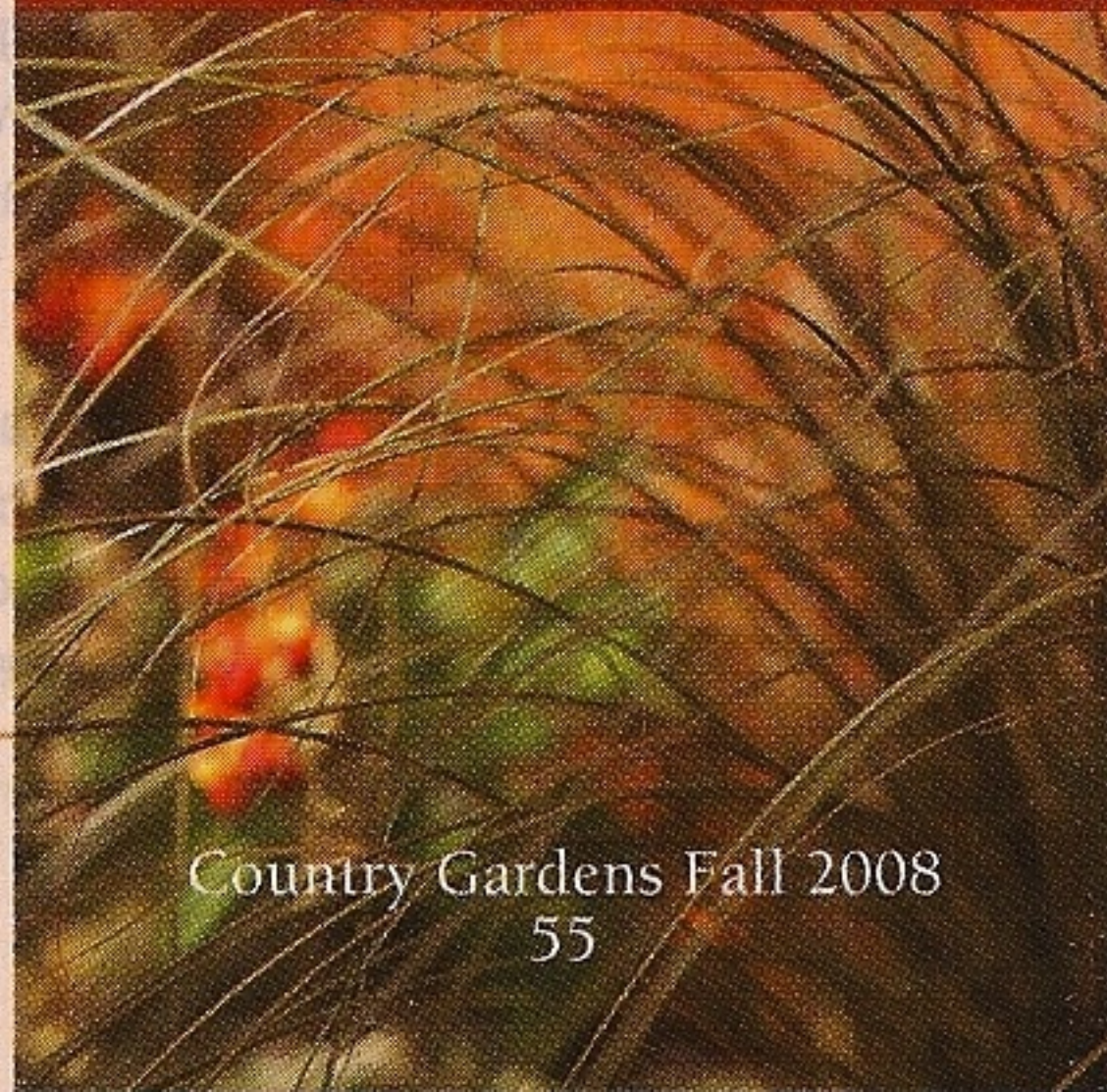
American bittersweet  
(*Celastrus scandens*)



Icicle pansy (*Viola x wittrockiana*  
'Icicle Clear Orange')



Toffee Twist sedge  
(*Carex flagellifera* 'Toffee Twist')



Country Gardens Fall 2008  
55

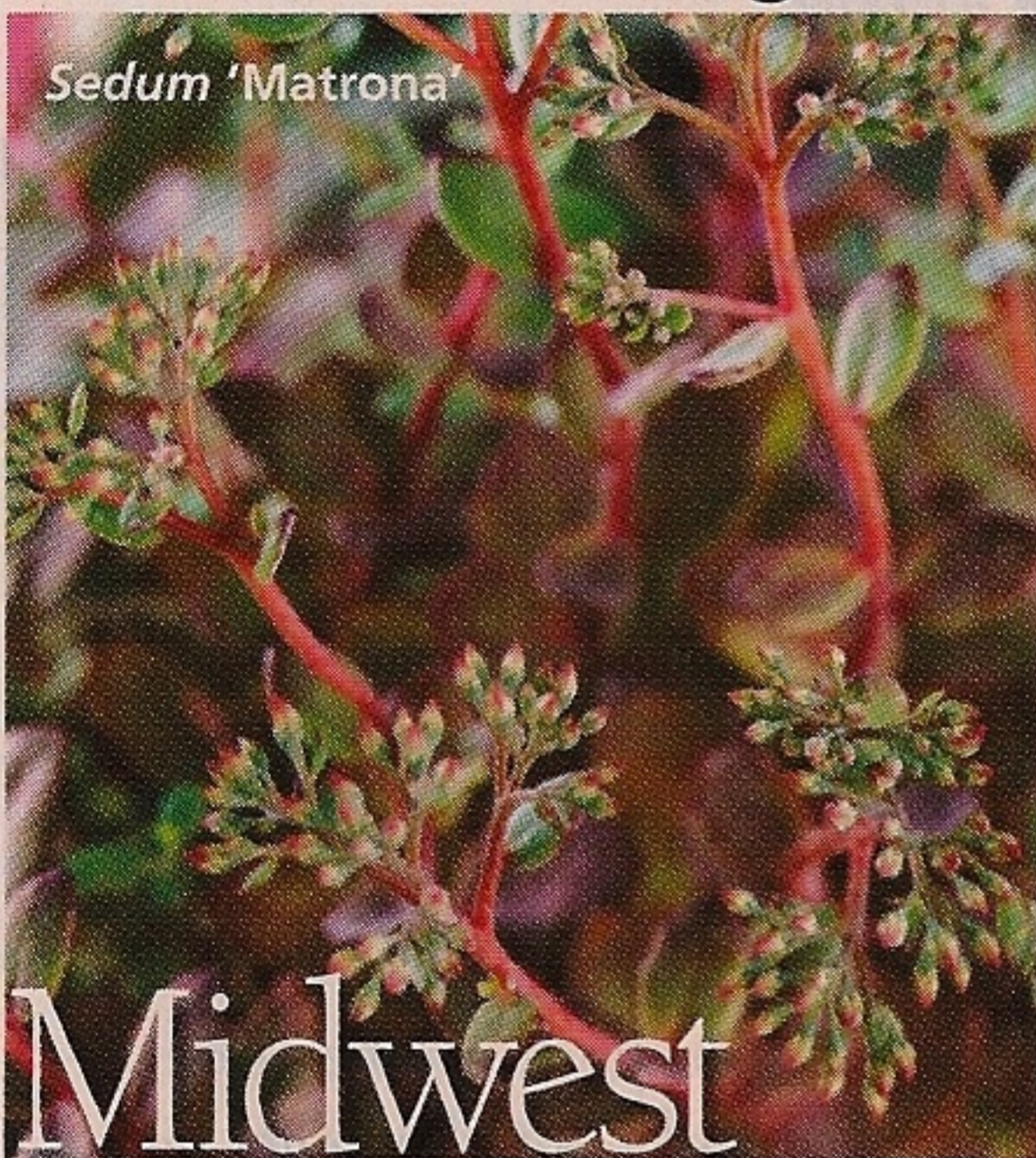
Snapdragon





# Fire Up Your Fall Garden

Just when it seems like the garden is surrendering, fall bloomers begin their late-season glow. Our regional editors share their favorites.



Sedum 'Matrona'

## Midwest

King Au

There's plenty of flash in a Midwestern autumn. The cool and colorful season actually revives gardens and gardeners; after a long summer, everything looks fresh again. Here are some of my favorite plants for fall:

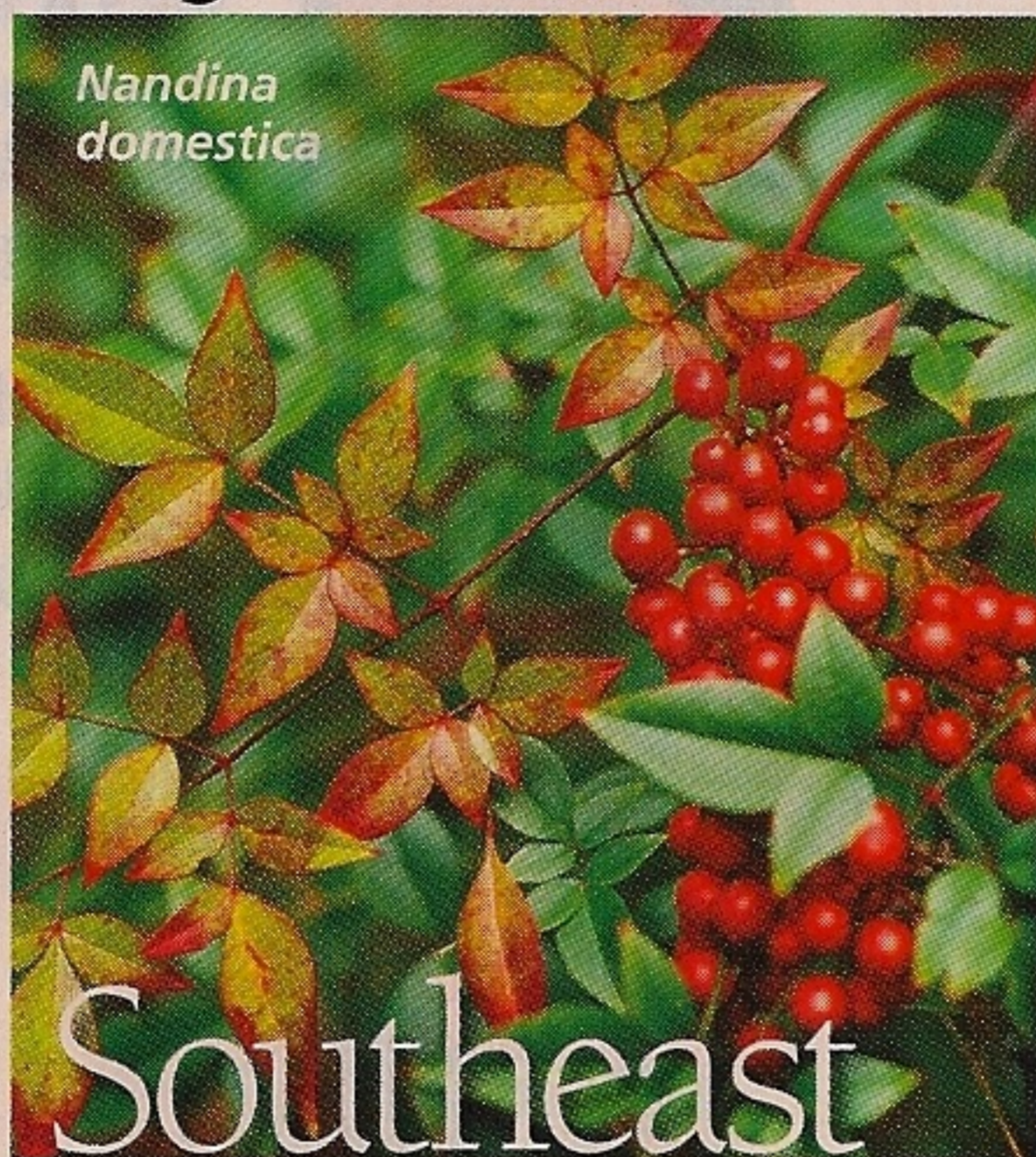
Our native grasses are at their best in autumn light. Prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepsis*) turns copper as the season advances; big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) takes on a luminous, rusty hue; and the leaves of northern sea oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*) dance on delicate amber wands.

*Sedum 'Matrona'* has handsome silver-gray leaves, burgundy stems, and flower heads that start with a purple blush and turn mahogany. I love it next to blackberry lily (*Belamcanda chinensis*), which has clusters of shiny black seeds in fall.

*Heuchera villosa 'Autumn bride'* produces great sprays of creamy white flowers in September; I first saw this plant in sweeping flowerbeds along shaded walkways at the Chicago Botanic Garden.

Shrubs contribute mightily to the autumn landscape. Oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*), vernal witch hazel (*Hamamelis vernalis*), American cranberry bush (*Viburnum trilobum*), and Blackhaw viburnum (*V. prunifolium*) have showy fall foliage.

Contributed by Marty Ross, who lives in Kansas City and writes a monthly gardening column for Universal Press Syndicate.



Nandina domestica

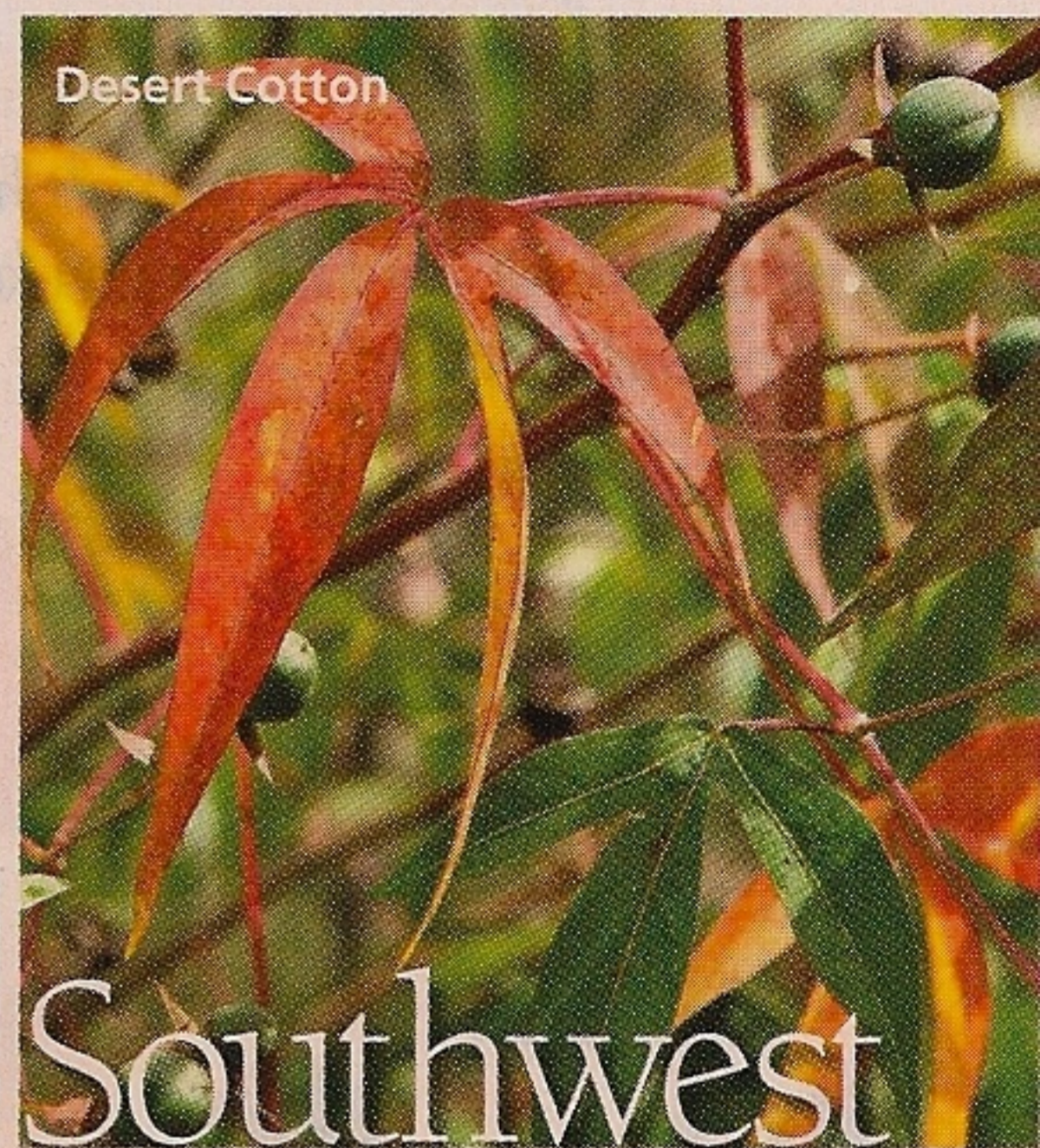
## Southeast

Pete Krumhardt

Southerners welcome those waning days of summer, when blazing heat relinquishes its stranglehold on weary gardens. While traditional fall plants, such as pansies, violas, snapdragons, mums, asters, cabbages, and kale, are reliable methods of injecting color, I seek inexpensive, small (pint or 1-gallon) shrubs I can use to brighten my landscape. Here are some of my favorite plants that offer autumn interest:

- Purple-leaf wintercreeper (*Euonymus fortunei 'Coloratus'*) is a low-growing groundcover with purple-red fall foliage.
- *Loropetalum chinense 'Razzleberri'* has burgundy foliage year-round with occasional shocking-pink, spidery flowers.
- Rockspray (*Cotoneaster horizontalis*) produces glossy green leaves that turn red in fall along with bright red berries.
- *Nandina domestica 'Firepower'* doesn't produce berries like the standard form, but it does have beautiful, crinkly, fiery-red foliage.
- Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica 'Henry's Garnet'*) contributes brilliant red-purple fall foliage on arching branches.
- Encore azaleas (*Rhododendron* hybrids) are a surefire hit. 'Autumn Embers', for example, features reddish-orange blooms that combine well with nature's autumn cloak.

Contributed by Glenn R. DiNella, a garden writer, editor, designer, and artist living in Birmingham, Alabama.



Desert Cotton

## Southwest

In the Southwest, the desert heat finally gives way to cooler temperatures in fall. Although we don't grow sugar maples in this region, the following three woody plants are sure to add autumn zing to your garden.

The Texas red oak (*Quercus buckleyi*) is one of the few deciduous oak trees native to the southwest that turns color (a vivid red!) in the fall. Its mature size is 25–30 feet high and wide, making it compatible with smaller residential landscapes. In hot desert locations, avoid planting Texas red oak adjacent to concrete, which reflects too much heat.

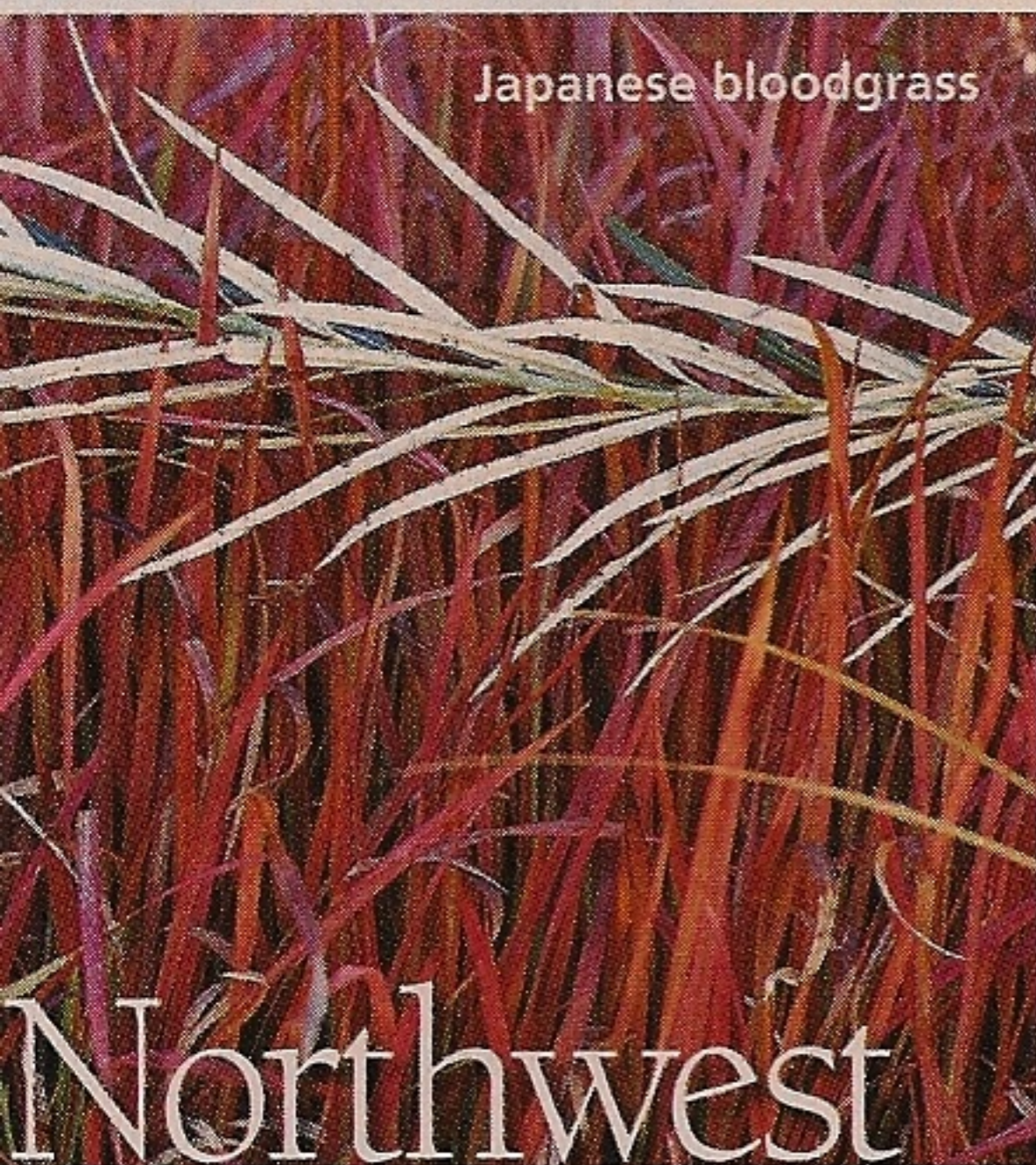
Ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*) produces thorny, arching canes that are flame-tipped with red flowers in the spring. What is less reported is that its leaves—which are green during wet summer weather—turn an arresting shade of yellow in the fall. At maturity, the ocotillo reaches 15 feet in height with a 10-foot spread.

Desert Cotton (*Gossypium thurberi*) is a wild relative of domestic cotton. In the summer this deciduous shrub produces lovely white and pink flowers that resemble hibiscus blooms. In the fall, its maplelike three- and five-point lobed leaves turn a mottled green and crimson. Desert cotton will grow to 7 feet tall and 3–5 feet wide.

Contributed by Scott Calhoun, a garden designer and writer living in Tucson.

# Resources

For more information about gardening and services featured in this issue, contact the sources listed here. The source is unknown for products not listed.



Japanese bloodgrass

## Northwest

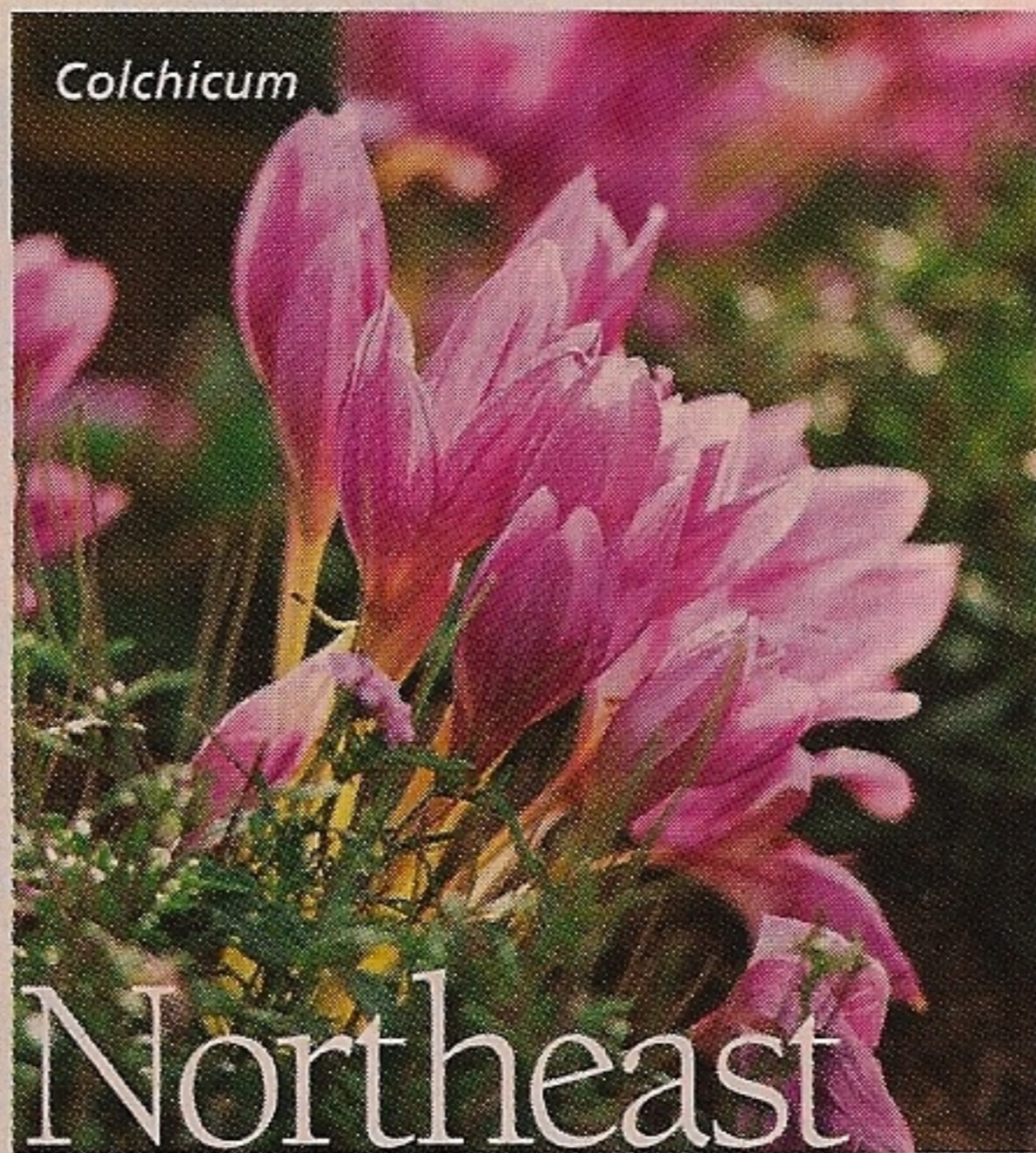
Bob Stefko

While we don't have the intense blaze of fall color the Northeast is famous for, our mild autumn weather carries on from mid-September through Thanksgiving. Brilliant color, berries, and flowers last for many weeks, with sourwood (*Oxydendrum arboreum*), Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*), and burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*) blazing orange and scarlet against dark autumn skies.

Sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*) in shades of gold and copper, sky-blue *Salvia uliginosa*, and the willowy *Boltonia asteroides* 'Snowbank' with its bright white, daisylike flowers keep the garden blooming through October. For maximum impact, combine these beauties with Japanese bloodgrass (*Imperata cylindrica* 'Rubra'), orange Chinese lanterns (*Physalis alkekengi*), and dwarf plumbago (*Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*), a groundcover with brilliant blue flowers set off by plum-colored leaves.

Try mixing in a few berry plants, such as our native snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*), the pretty little shrub *Pernettya mucronata*, beautyberry (*Callicarpa* ssp.), and blue flax lily (*Dianella caerulea*), an Australian perennial with stunning purple fruits, and your garden will keep on luring you outside until the first hard frost of winter.

Contributed by Valerie Easton, who lives in Seattle and writes a weekly column for The



Colchicum

## Northeast

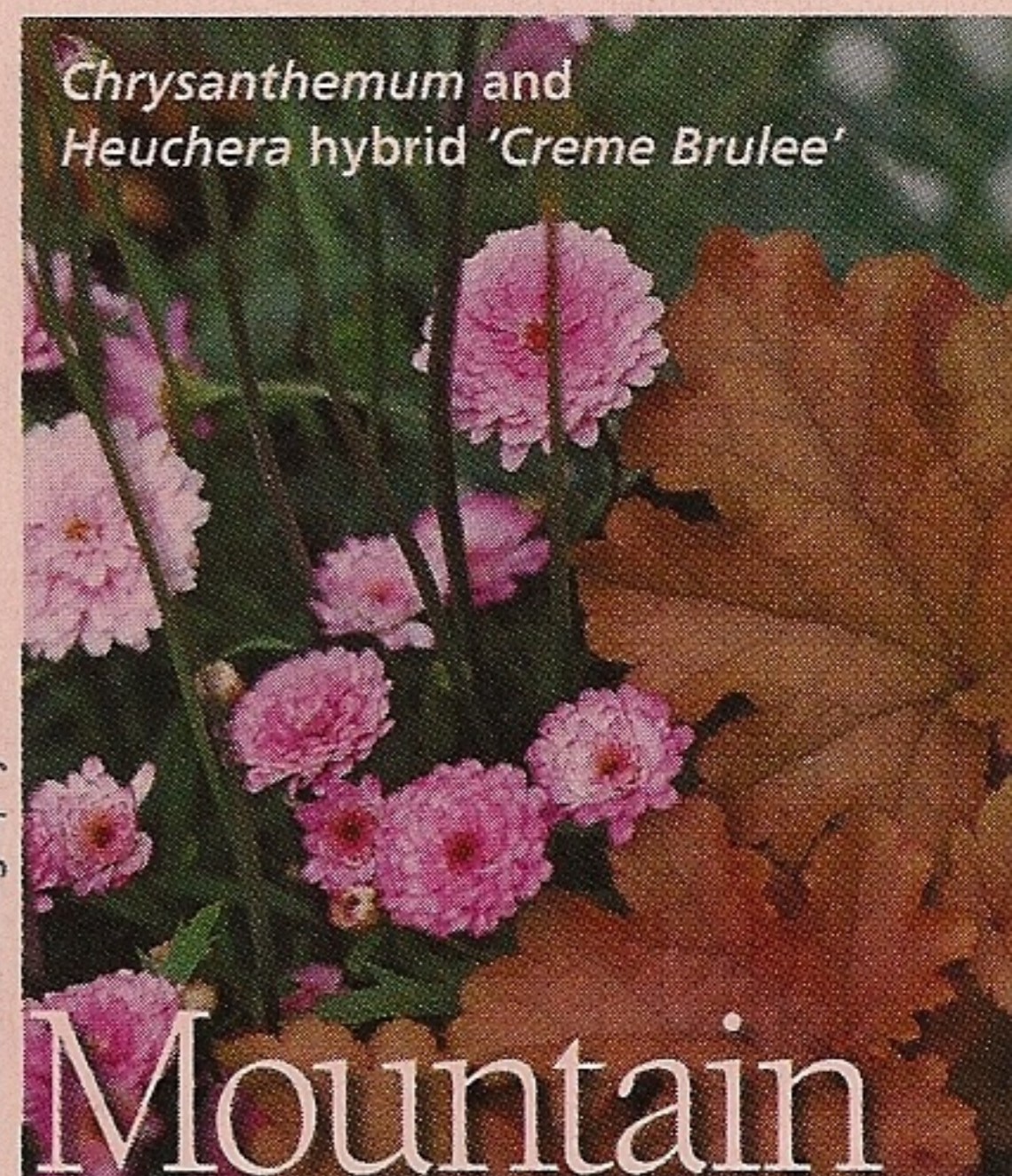
Himeisen Photography

Short days and crisp nights transform dwarf plumbago (*Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*) into a scarlet canvas that echoes the fiery autumn landscape above it. This groundcover's startling blue flowers sparkle above its blushing leaves.

Purple-leaf smoke bush (*Cotinus coggygria*) is well-known for clouds of long-lasting frothy flower plumes, but it also shines for its fall foliage. Variety 'Velvet Cloak' has purple-pink blooms and deep red fall color. 'Royal Purple' starts with red spring foliage that turns purple by summer, then transforms into a magnificent display of red, orange, and yellow in autumn. Dwarf *Fothergilla gardenii* 'Mount Airy' is another fall foliage superstar. The foliage turns apricot, crimson, and gold.

For jewellike fall blooms, plant clusters of *Colchicum* bulbs, also known as autumn crocus, among shrubs. *Colchicum* flowers appear like magic in early to midautumn, long after their spring foliage has gone dormant. Flowers range from pure white to pink, blue, and rosy purple, depending on the variety, and are larger than spring-blooming crocus. *Colchicum autumnale* 'Alboplenum' has plush white blooms that resemble water lilies, and *Colchicum* 'The Giant' features 10- to 12-inch-tall violet flowers.

Contributed by Ann Whitman, who lives and gardens in Bolton, Vermont, in the



Chrysanthemum and Heuchera hybrid 'Creme Brulee'

## Mountain

Hyssop, or hummingbird mint, provides prolific blooms through the first frost. Plant Select varieties (chosen for their resilience and beauty growing in the mountains and plains) include orange Sunset hyssop (*Agastache rupestris*), yellow-orange Coronado hyssop (*Agastache aurantiaca* 'Coronado'), and lavender-rose Sonoran Sunset hyssop (*Agastache cana*).

The lush foliage of *Bergenia cordifolia* 'Autumn Glory' deepens and intensifies with autumn's chill, as does *Heuchera sanguinea* 'Canyon Duet', a compact coral-bell variety with purple-veined dark green foliage that turns reddish. For interesting foliage color that withstands the cold, the new Proven Winners Dolce Series doesn't disappoint. *Heuchera* hybrid 'Key Lime Pie' is chartreuse; 'Blackcurrant' has bold purple leaves with silver accents; and the bronze foliage of 'Creme Brulee' develops brown sugar highlights as the temperature drops.

Ornamental grasses form a dramatic backdrop to fall flowers and foliage, adding texture and movement. Maidengrass (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Gracillimus'), feather reedgrass (*Calamagrostis acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster'), and switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) form appealing seed heads.

Contributed by Paula Yantorno, who is an avid gardener living in Denver