Some even lose their leaves to provide you with those nostalgic leaf-raking chores. Many of Florida’s trees lose and replace their leaves within a period of only days or weeks, such as the laurel oak, red maple, and live oaks. Other trees such as the persimmon and swamp tupelo may remain leafless for several months, beginning as early as September or October, while many native oaks shed and replace their leaves in late winter or early spring without anyone taking much notice. The time between complete leaf fall and budding out varies from four to ten weeks for many central Florida species. A few trees like the turkey oak and the southern sugar maple (Florida maple) will retain many of their dried brown leaves throughout the dormant period. Many may not completely shed all leaves until the last week in December or the first week in January.
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FLORIDA AUTUMN —— —from page 1

Flowering dogwood (Cornus florida) is a small tree grown in rich well-drained soils of central and north Florida. Dogwood provides both colorful red foliage in the fall and beautiful white flower bracts in the spring.

Red maple (Acer rubrum) is one of the most popular and easily grown trees in Florida. Brightly colored yellow-orange-red leaf displays occur in December. In January red maple flowers quickly produce red winged seeds (samara) and sends out new leaves. Red maple is a medium-sized tree which prefers moist soil. Growth is relatively fast and seeds and seedlings develop rapidly in rich potting soil. Small trees are easily transplanted.

Southern sugar maple or Florida maple (Acer barbatum) is a beautiful tree of upland hammocks which can be found on the rolling limestone hills of Hernando County northward. The southern sugar maple is very shade tolerant and displays a nice form and foliage when grown as an understory tree. Open grown specimens placed in well drained sandy-shelly soil (pH 7+) in Pinellas County are growing up to 5 to 6 ft. per year in height. Numerous seedlings collected beneath mature trees can be pot grown up to a height of 4 ft. in a single season. Prior to planting, soil should be richly mulched. Southern sugar maple appears to be suitable for use in the urban landscape. Fall color is yellow to golden orange and occasionally orange-red.

Dormancy following the fall color is generally from the end of December to late in February or a period of about 8 weeks. Many brown leaves usually remain on the tree until budding in the spring begins.

The sweetgum (Liquidambar styraciflua) is a large tree with a tall pyramidal crown. The natural range is from south central Florida northward and the tree is generally associated with mesic hammocks and found along natural watercourses. Sweetgum will grow in sandy soil. The star-shaped leaves vary from a yellow-orange to purple. Sweetgum is widely recommended for planting throughout most of Florida peninsula.

The turkey oak (Quercus laevis) is found on dry sandy ridges from Collier County northward and is often seen associated with longleaf pine. Turkey oak is a medium sized tree well adapted to the periodically burned pine/oak sand hills and requires full sun. Some improved vigor and leaf coloring has been observed in trees under cultivation. Turkey oak has large deep pointed lobes similar to other red oaks found in the north. Fall colors are orange-red in December and the dead leaves usually persist on the tree. New leaves normally appear by the first week in March.

Shumard oak (Quercus shumardii) is one of the largest of the southern red oaks reaching heights of 100 to 130 ft. with trunks 3 to 5 ft. in diameter (max. 180 by 8 ft.). Shumard oak is found in well drained coastal limestone hammocks and rich upland hammocks (usually underlain by limestone) from Hernando County northward. Potted acorns can easily be grown to a height of 5 ft. in one season. Small trees planted in full sun, in well drained sandy soil with some shell (pH 7+); in Pinellas County have gained from 5 to 8 ft. in height per year. The lustrous green leaves are 6 to 8 inches long with deep pointed lobes. The orange-red fall colors are usually seen late in December. Shumard oak tends to grow tall and the branches spread to form a rather open crown. Some care should be given to protect the thin bark of young trees from mechanical injury.

Pignut hickory (Carya glabra) is a medium to occasionally large tree which is found from the mesic hammocks of south central Florida northward. Pignut hickory will grow well in sandy soil and is shade tolerant. Pignut hickory is difficult to transplant; however, good results may be obtained by planting nuts directly on a selected site. After 6 growing seasons a height of 15 ft. can be obtained on sandy soil. Once established, growth rates may range between 3 to 4 ft. per year. Pignut hickory leaves often become bright yellow in December.

Bald Cypress (Taxodium distichum) and pond cypress (Taxodium ascendens) are well known wetland species found throughout Florida. Although naturally found in a wet environment, cypress trees can be established without much difficulty on many upland soils. Pot grown seedlings can develop to a height of 3 ft. in one growing season. In well drained sandy soil a height of 15 ft. can be obtained for bald cypress in 6 growing seasons. Bald cypress is generally selected over pond cypress because of the fern-like foliage, pyramidal form and more rapid growth rate. In central Florida bald cypress usually leaves out 3 to 4 weeks earlier in the spring than pond cypress. Both trees provide a pleasant fragrance as the leaves and small branchlets turn to a gold or rusty brown. The taprooting characteristic of the bald cypress often makes even small trees difficult to remove. Cypress should be planted in full sun and not crowded by other trees.

Most of the trees discussed may be grown in peninsula Florida when cared for in an urban environment. An effort should be made to obtain seed or plants originating from the local geographic area. Some attention should be given to avoid fertilization and the development of high pH conditions particularly for trees like the turkey oak and pignut hickory. The placement of trees in bedding areas where they can be mulched and protected from the damaging cuts of edgers and mowers is highly recommended.

And then when your northern visitors ask, “Don’t you miss the fall colors?” you can say “Of course not. Florida has an autumn, too!”

CONSIDER

Each plant that becomes extinct causes the extinction of 10 to 30 dependent species of insects, higher animals, and other plants.

Dr. Peter Raven, Missouri Botanical Garden

If you plant natives, you will be able to spend your time watching your plants grow rather than making them grow.

Joyce Gann, in "Planting a Hammock"

Half the species of trees native to North America grow in Florida.

Joyce Gann, in "...Planting a Hammock"