The general conception is that bark on trees and shrubs is brown in colour. The many trees and shrubs at Wolfson disprove this theory, with almost every colour present, ranging from pink to orange and white!

When it comes to Berries...
Most people think of red or orange berries but we have purple, turquoise, pink and white!

Again when one thinks of foliage and leaves ‘green’ springs to mind in Spring and Summer, Wolfson can boast Flamingo pink, peach, copper, yellow, purple, blue and Silver!

As you can see there is no reason for the Garden to be dull and lacking in colour, even in the absence of flowers, which would traditionally ‘colour the garden’.

The Remarkable variety of Bark Colours and Textures within Wolfson’s Gardens

The Bark contains the living vessels which transport water up the tree from the roots, and sugars throughout the plant (both up and down) to provide energy for growth. One would thus think that the colour of the bark would be unimportant, and all bark would be brown. Wrong! Trees have evolved and developed many different colours of bark, perhaps as a form of camouflage from hungry mammals that will strip the bark for its sweet sugars, or so we humans could be truly be amazed by the range of colours and textures!

Wolfson gardens contain may trees and shrubs with truly surprising and beautiful bark colours, textures and patterns

The following can be found in the gardens:

Many Acers have ‘snake skin’ bark, which is striated with white waxy streaks and purple, green, coral and pink bark (the waxy streaks are a plant form of ‘suncream’, protecting the young bark from sun scorch!). The onset of cold weather triggers a change in colour, the best example being Acer ‘Phoenix’ which turns from brown-green to shrimp pink in Winter. This, along with Acer ‘Sango-Kaku’ (coral red bark and shoots), can be found in the college ‘Winter Garden Room’, situated behind Lee Hall, whose coral red windows echo the bark of the Acers. Other Winter beauties here include Cornus ‘Mid-winter fire’ (orange-pink), Cornus ‘Sibirica’ (scarlet), Rubus ‘silver-fern’ and ‘Golden vale’ (ghostly white prickly stems), Salix Erythrophylla (contorted orange stems), Salix ‘Britzensis’ (scarlet shoots – six feet long) and the golden Bamboo, whose canes are gold with a green groove and occasional ‘zig-zag’ as they grow! Rubus ‘niveus’ has highly glossed 8 foot purple stems, a remarkable sight in Winter and a real Winter warmer! Take a look at this collection of colourful and scented plants. It proves the Winter garden can be truly uplifting at this time of year.
Many of the colourful trees are native to China. These include Prunus ‘Serrula’ (Tibetica) whose bark is honey and mahogany coloured with an incredible sheen, resembling a finely polished table. Its bark also peels in ribbons, revealing new and varied colours. Another is Acer ‘Griseum’ the ‘paperbark’ Maple, whose cinnamon bark peels in paper like sheets and whose Autumn leaf colour is bright scarlet. Acer ‘Serpentine’ has magnificent snakeskin bark, with white striations on a fresh green bark. Sorbus ‘Beissneri’ has warm orange-copper bark and young shoots of dark coral red.

The Birch trees are renowned for their interesting white/grey bark, but have you seen Betula ‘Pink Champagne’ with bark flushed pink and cream ?, or Betula ‘nigra heritage’ whose shaggy peeling bark is a warm cream-orange colour. The best known small Birch in this group is Betula‘Albo-Sinensis’, the ‘Chinese Birch’ with grey-orange-pinky bark and coppery pink branches. All can be seen in Wolfsons gardens, and make the winter garden a welcoming place.

The largest trees must be our two Californian Wellingtonias in Fuchs garden. The bark is a miracle of evolution, being ‘fire-proof’, essential in the frequent Californian forest fires. The Bark is soft and spungey, containing no resin, thus making it inflammable. These can grow 300 feet tall, but become vulnerable not to fire but lightening strikes and wind damage, especially in the UK, which can split these giants in two.

On some plants it is not just the bark that is colourful but also the thorns. Rubus ‘Phoenicolasium’ or the Japanese ‘Wineberry’ has long red arching stems and thorns. Euonymus ‘Alatus’ has broad ‘corky’ wings, quite unlike anything else in the plant world.

Other trees plants with fascinating bark here at Wolfson include the ‘London Plane’ tree, the Pines and Cedars, and the Climbing Hydrangea, which has a lovely shaggy cinnamon-honey coloured bark.

**The Berries (fruits) of Wolfson’s Gardens**

Most berries are brightly coloured to attract birds who disperse the seeds within, in a ready made manure compost!

The most eye-catching and my favourite has to be Billardiera ‘longiflora’ whose glossy blue-purple fruits resemble ‘Tooty Fruity’ sweets. Another favourite has to be Viburnum ‘Davidii’, whose numerous turquoise berries provide a startling sight in Spring. The S pindle tree, Euonymus ‘Europhaeus’ has brilliant pink-red capsules that open to reveal vivid orange seeds. The Rowan tree ‘Sorbus’, has berries ranging from pink to red, orange, yellow and even white. Sorbus’Joseph rock’ has golden yellow fuits which contrast dramatically with its red and orange autumn leaf colour. Sorbus ‘Pink Pagoda’ has pink fruits and ‘Eastern Promise’ has eye catching deep rose-pink fruits and superb’Autumn’ leaf colouration.
The Rainbow of foliage colours in Wolfson’s Gardens

Most leaves (foliage) tend to be green although nature has provided us with a wonderful range of leaf colours. This has occurred due to the tendency of green leaved plants producing ‘Sports’ or offshoots with a different colour or variegation. These have been cultivated into new colourful varieties of trees, shrubs, perennials etc. Modern plant breeding has also produced many new varieties (Hybrids).

I think one of my favourite foliage plants at Wolfson has to the Cerics ‘Forest Pansy’, a purple leaved form of the green ‘Judas tree’. Its leaves are almost translucent and silk like in strong sunlight, purple and heart shaped, some as big as a large hand, and in Autumn they colour red and orange.

Others with wonderful leaf colour include Acer ‘Flamingo’, whose new growth is flushed pink, turning to green and white variegation; Cotinus ‘Grace’, whose purple leaves are silk like and translucent in sunlight; Elaeagnus ‘Quick-silver’, whose leaves are reflective silver; Sambucas ‘Black Lace’, whose leaves are purple – almost black, with a lovely reflective sheen and Ribes ‘Broklebankii’, whose golden leaves have a wonderful metallic quality.

One of the most widely purchased foliage plants of recent years is the evergreen Heuchera/Heucherella group. These come in a range of purples, greens, yellows, reds, burgundy, silvers etc. We have many of the better (new) varieties at Wolfson. Many are named after food, marketing wisdom believing they sell better if named to make the mouth water! These are just a few of them: ‘Plum pudding’, ‘Tiramisu’, ‘Peach Flambe’, ‘Crème Brulee’, ‘Lime pie’, and ‘Sweet tea’.

Best Wishes for 2016 and Happy Plant Hunting.

Phil Stigwood

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