

## Winter Interest in the Landscape

Winter landscaping is a term thrown around a lot this time of year, but how can a landscape look appealing in the winter? A couple inches of pure white adds beauty to any yard, but shouldn't your plants stand out even in the wintertime? Although a winter landscape may lack bright flowers and bright green foliage, careful planning can result in winter gardens with color and interest.

The two keys to an interesting winter landscape are selection of plant material and good design. When designing a winter garden, choose the vantage point from which the garden will be most commonly enjoyed in winter. The view out of your kitchen window or from your favorite reading nook, for example. Select planting sites that are easily seen from these areas. Green is the easiest color to add to a winter landscape with the use of broad-leaved evergreens, cedars, spruces and pines. Pines, and especially spruces, are not well adapted to Kansas conditions and need to be well cared and variety selection should be carefully considered.

Specimen plants are plants with unique characteristics like an oddly shaped evergreen, a shrub with bright berries that stay on all winter, or a deciduous tree with unusual bark. These plants will stand out in winter landscapes.

Here are a few ideas for adding winter interest to your landscape:

**Redosier Dogwood** (*Cornus stolonifera*): The young stems of this plant are bright red during the winter months and become more intensely colored toward spring. Older stems are often pruned out during the spring to encourage more of the young, more brightly colored twigs. Redosier Dogwood is shade tolerant.

**Yellow Twig Dogwood** (*Cornus stolonifera* 'Flaviramea'): This shrub is much like Redosier Dogwood except twigs are bright yellow rather than red.

**Red Chokeberry** (*Aronia arbutifolia* 'Brilliantissima'): White flowers in May, with a vivid red fall color. This shrub produces bright-red fruit that mature in September, are shunned by birds and persist into winter.

**Lacebark Elm** (*Ulmus parvifolia*): This is the true Chinese elm. A tough durable tree, the lacebark elm adapts well to poor soils and extremes in pH. The bark is what really sets this tree apart during the winter due to its mottled combinations of gray, green, orange and brown.

**Chinese Fringetree** (*Chionanthus retusus*): This tree has gray bark that furrows as it grows, creating great texture. It tolerates a variety of pH's and soil types. In the spring, it will also show beautiful white flowers. This is the perfect tree for those with less space, it's height is anywhere from 10-25' with a spread of 10-20'.

**Vernal Witchazel** (*Hamamelis vernalis*): A native species, this witchazel has late winter flowers that are yellow/orange/red and fragrant. Dark green leaves turn rich butter-yellow to golden yellow in the fall.

**Norway Spruce** (*Picea abies*): This mid-sized tree (40-60' tall) is a suitable evergreen for this area, although it will still need some attention. In addition to adding green to a brown yard, evergreens are excellent shelter for winter birds.

The time for planting is behind us, but cold days are perfect for planning next year's garden. Grab a stack of gardening magazines and create a visioning board. As you design your garden, think of each season. Try to select plants that have interesting features in two separate seasons to maximize their impact. Also avoid planting only a few kinds of plants. A diversified yard is more interesting to look at while also reducing disease and pest management. Don't forget to utilize your local Extension office for proper variety selection!