

## Winter Garden Surprises

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With the arrival of winter, most of us are quite willing to put gardening on the back burner especially during the hectic holiday season. We are content to wait for the arrival of the gardening catalogs to get back in the swing. Winter, however, offers a very special time in the garden to enjoy the subtle features in the landscape. Textures and forms are more noticeable and can be much more appreciated. The winter palette is dominated by subdued tones of brown, green, blues, and yellows, and yet there can be striking surprises of colored bark, branches, and berries. The silhouette of trees offer the opportunity to see handsome, beautiful trunks, unusual colored branches, and exfoliating bark. Evergreens form the backdrop for winter gardens and their weeping forms add great interest. The deep chocolate color of the dried heads of cone flowers, black-eyed Susans, and Sedum 'Autumn Joy' blend so well with the tans of grasses creating a "living" dried arrangement. Bulbs and perennials please us with their late winter colors and textures.

What are some of the more unusual trees, shrubs, and perennials that can be incorporated in extend the garden into winter? The paper bark maple, *Acer griseum*, has an outer shaggy, flaking bark of reddish brown that peels to show an underneath bark of cinnamon brown. The fall foliage turns a brilliant red, adding another reason to grow this 25' tall tree. Another small maple, the coral bark Japanese maple, *Acer palmatum* 'Sango Kaku' is especially ornamental in winter with its beautiful coral red bark. This maple grows to about 15' to 20' high and will grow in full sun or part sun. However, the full sun will bring out the fall leaf and bark colors. The red jade crabapple, *Malus* 'Red Jade', is a beautiful weeping form growing to about 20' in height. The abundance of red fruits lasts well into winter. This is indeed an outstanding, attractive tree for the small garden.

The following shrubs are noteworthy in the winter landscape for their flowers. Witch hazel, *Hamamelis intermedia* 'Arnold's Promise', grown as a large deciduous shrub or small tree, is known for its lovely autumn color and late winter flowers. The leaves turn a rich red and yellow in the fall. In late winter the fragrant, yellow, spider-like flowers are a harbinger of spring. Fragrant winterhazel, *Corylopsis pauciflora*, is an under used shrub in the garden. The scented soft delicate yellow flowers bloom in the beginning of March before forsythia. The shrub grows to about 8'-10' tall and has a bushy spreading habit. Prune after blooming. *Fothergilla gardenii*, another scented shrub, is slow growing eventually reaching 8' in height. The fall foliage ranges from a

beautiful yellow-orange to fiery red. The fragrant, white, bottle brush flowers are borne on bare branches in early March.

The perennials listed are chosen for their attractive evergreen foliage of their winter flowers. European wild ginger, *Assarum europaeum*, is an evergreen ground cover with glossy, heart shaped leaves that have a spicy smell. The plant grows about 5 inches tall and does best in partial to full shade. The ivy, *Hedera helix* 'Goldheart', is a popular ivy, adding a splash of color. The leaves are small, three pointed and green with a golden-yellow center. The ivy grows under ten feet so it is ideal for the small garden. Grow in full sun for optimum color.

The hellebores are a most important group for winter texture and color. The Christmas Rose, *Helleborus nigra*, blooming in our area in February, produces nodding white flowers with yellow centers. The leathery leaves are divided into seven or nine segments and are low to the ground so that the flowers stand above the foliage. The Lenten Rose, *Helleborus hybridis*, blooms for at least a month beginning in early March. The flowers range from white, creamy green, through pink to wine to brown colored. The hellebores are considered evergreen since their luscious new leaves appear before the old ones have disappeared. *Helleborus* does best in partial shade in rich, well drained soil. They go well with violets, snowdrops, and primroses in a woodland setting.

By blending winter attractive plants harmoniously into your garden you can all a fourth season to your landscape. Finally, there is a season to reap the rewards of your hard work, to enjoy, reflect, and to make plans for next spring.

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