

Plants with Winter Interest

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The winter landscape has less color compared to spring, summer and fall; which is why plants with winter interest make good choices for landscapes.

The next few months will be a great time to make note of plants with winter interest. It might be a bit of color, bark texture, or even the outline of a plants shape. If we pay attention in our landscapes, we might be surprised at what we notice.

Ornamental grasses having winter interest when their tops are not cut back until spring. Their plumes add texture and they sparkle when backlit by the sun. Many grasses have blonde, reddish-orange or burgundy winter foliage such as 'Blaze' Little Bluestem and 'Prairie Fire' Switchgrass.

Evergreen conifers provide a lot of, well, green color. Did you know green is soothing on the eyes? Stare at an evergreen for a bit to take a break from computer screens. Most people try to have an evergreen or two in their landscape as a wind break and for winter color.

Some perennial flowers retain foliage color all winter. A few are coral bells, Penstemon and variegated Euonymous. Penstemon has shiny green foliage, Euonymous is light green and white, and the leaves of coral bell range in color from purple to copper to variegated. 'Angelina' sedum remains yellow all winter.

Other plants having winter interest are those with fruit that persist into winter. Crabapple is a great example. Most of the newer cultivars have smaller fruit that clings all winter and remains red. Crabapples are no longer the messy plants they once were. And they benefit birds too. Be sure to select a disease resistant cultivar.

Another small ornamental tree with colorful winter fruit is hawthorn. Hawthorns that are noted for their excellent fruit display are Washington hawthorn and 'Winter King' hawthorn.

For shrubs, consider beautyberry, American cranberrybush, winterberry, and coralberry. Beautyberry is a smaller shrub, 3 to 6 feet tall, with clusters of light purple berries. It grows well on hot, dry sites, but tolerates part shade as well as clay soil.

American cranberrybush viburnum grows 8 to 12 feet tall in full sun but will take part shade. Fruit production is best in full sun and if other Viburnums are nearby for pollination. In fall, the fruit turns bright red and persists through the fall.

Coralberry ranges in height from 3 to 5 feet in full sun to part shade. Clusters of pinkish fruit persist well into winter and some people use the branches for indoor floral arrangements. This shrub can spread some by suckers so thin them out as needed.

Winterberry is a deciduous holly, meaning it drops its leaves in winter. It grows 6 to 10 feet tall. They can be a challenge to grow as they need consistent moisture and a male and female plant are required for pollination and fruit set. Two good female varieties are 'Sparkleberry' and 'Winter Red.'

It's important to be sure a plant is suited to your growing environment before buying and planting it, but once you know that it is, then consider other characteristics like winter interest when selecting plants.

And don't forget to bundle up and get outdoors this winter, then keep an eye out for winter interest in landscape plants. You might find one that I have not mentioned here.

