



Woody Plants Create Beautiful Winter Landscapes

The first few frosts mark the end to routine summer maintenance like weeding and fertilizing and the beginning of fall chores like raking and mulching. The glorious colors of fall that replaced the bountiful colors of the summer garden are fading way too soon. Those early morning and late evening chills first welcomed are settling in. Winter is on its way.

Some gardeners dread the approach of winter, others with a small sense of relief. Do you remember what your landscape looked like last winter? Do adjectives like 'stark' or 'barren' come to mind? Adding some well-chosen woody plants may be the solution.

Adding massive blocks of evergreens may seem like an easy answer, but a landscape filled with plants that look the same in every season appears static. Some evergreens should be included for sure, but they should be tempered with the graceful, more open forms of deciduous woody plants.

Because deciduous trees and shrubs are bare for five months of the year in northern Illinois, it is important to choose types with ornamental qualities beyond their foliage. These trees and shrubs may be just what you need to take your winter garden from stark to stunning.

Dogwoods are available in tree and shrub forms and many shine in the snowy landscape. The Pagoda dogwood is a small tree suitable for use in sun or shade. It has a graceful, layered branching structure that offers a beautiful winter silhouette. Its deep plum-colored twigs add color and its spreading form makes it an excellent selection to anchor a bed at the corner of a deck or patio.



Cornelian cherry dogwood has dazzling deep mahogany-colored bark and golden buds at the tip of each twig. One of the earliest of flowering trees to bloom, this understory tree may explode into yellow before the snow has melted in spring.

The most recognizable of the dogwood family, the red- and yellow-dogwoods have become common in many our of winter landscapes. They thrive in difficult conditions including soggy areas and exposed hillsides. They are beautiful when planted alongside ornamental grasses.

It's time to look at crabapples again. Woody plant breeders have worked to develop new, disease-resistant varieties that bear an abundance of highly decorative fruit that stays on the tree much longer. Red berries dot the tree's branches all winter long.



Many trees sport beautiful bark. The river birch is a moisture-loving tree with exfoliating peachy tan bark. Lacebark elms and lacebark pines have patches of gray outer bark that flakes away to reveal a mosaic of colors. The paperbark maple is a lovely small tree cloaked in shiny reddish bark that peels and curls dramatically.

If you don't have enough space for a tree, look for large shrubs with broadly horizontal forms. Judd and Koreanspice viburnums have elegant, open habits. The blackhaw viburnum is so twiggy, it is almost dense enough to provide screening even without his leaves.

Witchhazels hang onto their leaves well into November and some varieties display their fragrant blooms in January or February.

Smaller shrubs can also contribute interest in the winter. The twigs of Japanese Kerria glow emerald green year-round and are lovely with snow at their bases. Vibrant red berries coat the leafless stems of Winterberry holly until the robins return to devour them in the spring.

And don't forget roses! By selecting varieties known for their large fruit called 'hips', you can extend the interest of this garden classic with a colorful show of rosy, apple-like globes.

Take a look around your yard and note where your landscape lacks interest after the leaves have dropped. Any winter landscape can move from bland to beautiful with the additional of a few new woody plants.



Diana Stoll is a horticulturist and the garden center manager at The Planter's Palette, 28W571 Roosevelt Rd., Winfield, IL 60190. Call 630-293-1040 or visit their website at www.planterpalette.com.