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GARDENING

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OHIO'S OWN GUIDE TO GREAT GARDENING & LANDSCAPING

Create Winter *Pizzazz*

**Tips for
Diversifying
Your Landscape**

**THE BEST-TASTING
VEGETABLES**

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Dried Grasses and Seed Heads

All of which demonstrates that to create an interesting and vibrant winter garden requires planning. In this way, creating a garden for the freezing cold is no different than planning one for when it is roasting hot outside. Gardeners who want to look at pizzazz come winter will not get it from one tree or one shrub, just as a fall garden display is not represented by one mum (*Chrysanthemum* sp.) plunked in a pot.

The genesis of an interesting winter garden starts in spring when plants are dug in. The 'Northwind' switch grass (*Panicum virgatum* 'Northwind') has erect blue foliage in summer, golden color in autumn and seed heads and foliage that persists through winter. Sedges (*Carex* sp.) are short grasses for shade gardens but also work in container garden combinations. Leave the *Carex* in the pot over winter for the tawny dried color, an excellent contrast for traditional evergreen boughs and branches with red berries still clinging.

Any perennial plants with excellent dried seed heads — think purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) and black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida*) — will look at home in a winter garden. Globe thistles (*Echinops bannaticus*) are tough as far north as Zone 3 and an excellent candidate for a winter landscape. The flower heads of *Astilbe chinensis* var. *taquetii* 'Superba' is beyond the traditional perennial for a shady spot, and it holds up through the long winter months as well.

Persistent Fruit on Crabapple Trees Gives Us Winter Interest

Crabapple trees (*Malus* sp.) with persistent fruit will add color to winter gardens while providing sustenance to birds to see them through harsh winters. Beside feeders from the summer, an ornamental fruit tree will attract birds when it is cold outside. Cultivars of *Malus* that hold fruit through winter include:

- Sugar Time® 'Suttsam' is an upright and spreading tree. The white fragrant flowers emerge from pink buds and the red fruit is enjoyed by birds.
- 'Purple Prince' has purple foliage, red flowers and purplish-blue fruit.
- 'Prairifire' has an upright and spreading form. The April and May flowers are red, fruit purplish red and the fall color orange.
- 'Louisa' is called a weeping crabapple tree. The umbrella form holds pink April flowers and yellow fruit with a faint red tint.



Evergreens and Deciduous Foliage in Microclimates

It is no secret that evergreens green up the dreary days of winter. Gardeners love the pines, firs and spruces for the cones they drop and Christmas trees they become in December. Assuming evergreens are already in the landscape, or part of a borrowed view, consider also adding deciduous plants in a protected portion of the garden. Identifying microclimates in the landscape expands the number of plant options beyond those with needle-shaped leaves.

Coral bells (*Heuchera* sp.) and pigsqueak (*Bergenia* sp.) are two perennials that are grown as much for the plants' foliage as for the flowers. Tougher than Zones 5 and 6, these perennials are worth growing in a protected site for the leaves that remain green, red or purple over the winter.

Winter gardens are primarily enjoyed from the aspect of a window looking outward. In purposefully designing a winter scene filled with color and activity, include hardscapes like trellis frames, winter bird baths and feeders and refrain from chopping down the herbaceous plants left from summer plantings. With a little vision, a winter garden will warm any gardener's heart. ♡

Chris Eirschele has been gardening more than 35 years, most often where snowfall is measured in feet. Her writings can be found at www.suite101.com/profile.cfm/staygardens.



Boxwood (*Buxus* sp.) are evergreen, even in February in Southern Ohio. Soil should be amended with organic matter to improve drainage to keep plants healthy all year.