

## WINTER INTEREST INSIDE AND OUT (published 12-28-2024)

By Patty Neas, Master Gardener

We just celebrated Christmas, and our homes are probably still beautifully decorated with fragrant evergreens and seasonal flowers. Removing the decorations, the cold, dreary weather and being inside makes for depressing prospects as gardeners face the winter season. We do not have to set aside our love of plants and the outdoors in winter. Our desire is to continue enjoying our landscape, keep growing plants, and be involved in planning for the springtime. Here are a few ideas to light up your winter days.

### WINTER INTEREST OUTSIDE

As we spend more time inside and look out our windows, are we pleased with our landscape? With the leaves fallen from the trees, we see the bare bones of our garden as the shapes and growth patterns of the plants are revealed. What about colors and wildlife? What grabs your attention? Winter is the perfect time to see, evaluate and make changes to the bones of our landscape plan. What features make a winter garden eye catching and interesting?

1-*The structure and growth patterns of trees and shrubs are interesting. Bark on tree trunks can add lots of texture and interest.* Is there pattern and texture in your garden? If not, adding evergreens offers a variety of shapes, and placed together, they create interesting contrasts. A crape myrtle's attractive bark and shape draws attention. The exfoliating bark of a Cornelian cherry, a small dogwood, is also interesting. Be sure to add some plants and trees you can use in Christmas decorations like magnolia, boxwood, and holly.

2- *Seedheads, dried flowers, and waving ornamental grasses are interesting and provide food for wildlife.* Instead of cleaning all this up in the fall, leave these for the wildlife and you will enjoy them as well. Coneflower seedheads, Russian sage, dried hydrangeas, switchgrass, and other grasses and seedheads are examples.

3- *Colorful stems and leaves are eye-catching especially in the snow or placed in front of an evergreen background.* Evergreens make beautiful winter color shows in dark greens, blues and yellows. Junipers, arborvitae, and false cypress are some choices. Red and yellow twig dogwoods are favorites for winter color. Ornamental cabbage and kale have colorful foliage that brighten pots or window boxes. Coral bells are colorful and with protection make a pretty winter show.

4-*Winter berries, fruits, and flowers bring color and again provide food for wildlife.* Camellias flower from fall through winter. Hellebores or Lenten roses sometimes bloom as early as December. We cannot fail to mention pansies, very popular in many winter landscapes. Winterberry holly, a plant of the month at UT, is a favorite for bright red berries. Some cultivars add yellow-orange and gold to the landscape. <https://utgardens.tennessee.edu/winterberry-holly-blazes-in-color-across-its-namesake-months/>

5-*Structural accents in the garden bring focal points to the winter garden.* Consider adding a prominent piece of garden art, an arbor, benches, or other structures. <https://durhammastergardeners.com/2024/02/28/enjoy-garden-decor-year-round-appreciating-and-incorporating-art-in-the-garden/>

The North Carolina Plant Toolbox is a great place to research landscape plants for winter as you plan winter landscape additions.

[https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/find\\_a\\_plant/?landscape\\_theme\\_id=11&texture=2&q=winter](https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/find_a_plant/?landscape_theme_id=11&texture=2&q=winter)

### WINTER INTEREST INSIDE

Not only do we want to grow plants inside for color and to satisfy our green thumb, we also long to fill our winter days productively as we prepare for spring.

- Houseplants such as colorful poinsettias, amaryllis, orchids, Christmas cactus, cyclamen, anthurium, African violets and citrus trees, keep us growing and our homes pleasing.
- Forcing branches to bloom indoors is a fun way to brighten winter days. Forsythia comes to mind, but you can force other spring blooming shrubs and trees. Here are the details: <https://marylandgrows.umd.edu/tag/forcing-branches/>
- Making seed bombs to sow native wildflowers can be fun with kids or adults. <https://extension.umn.edu/yd-curriculum/seed-bombs-and-guerilla-gardening>

When the days are short and dreary, enjoy the views and wildlife from your windows, make plans and take on special projects. These ideas can bring light and hope to the doldrums of winter. The cold and dark will pass quickly and you'll be back outside again before you know it! Happy Winter Gardening!

For more information about gardening, visit UTHORT's YouTube site for helpful videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjS3d1IklH1OZ1Z2qPvhgfQ>

Or Washington County's YouTube site:

<https://www.youtube.com/@utextensionwashingtoncounty>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at [www.netmga.net](http://www.netmga.net). Click the link at the top of the page, "ASK A MASTER GARDENER" to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.

*The Master Gardener Program is offered by the University of Tennessee Extension. The purpose of the Master Gardener program is to train people as horticultural-educated volunteers. These volunteers work in partnership with the local Extension office in their counties to expand educational outreach, providing home gardeners with researched-based information.*