

The Garden in Winter



Gardener, if you listen, listen well:
Plant for your winter pleasure, when the months
Dishearten; plant to find a fragile note
Touched from the brittle violin of frost.

V. Sackville-West
From *The Garden*

Fall's brilliance has passed. The garden is quiet and restful. Or is it? Take another look. You should be able to see the interesting shapes of bare branches. How many shades of greens are present in your garden? Did you leave seed pods to feed the birds and give you something to look at? Just because it's winter doesn't mean the garden has to be dull.

Now is a wonderful time to plant trees and shrubs. If you hold a clump of dirt in your hand and squeeze without getting dripping water, then you can still dig and plant. Nurseries dig and pot trees and shrubs in the Pacific Northwest after we have had three or four good fall rains and the weather has cooled. By planting now, you get first choice of the new crop. The plants you choose to grace your garden get a good start. Best of all, if we're having our typical winter, you don't have to worry about keeping them watered. As an added bonus, remaining weeds are easily removed.

Here's a couple of planting ideas to get you started.

Chamaecyparis pisifera 'Filifera Aurea' (gold thread false cypress): a broadly pyramidal shrub to 10 feet tall. Its foliage is bright green and yellow with large flattened fan leaves mixed with elongated threadlike branchlets that arch gracefully.

Cornus alba (Red-barked dogwood): a vigorous upright shrub 6 to 10 feet tall. Winter shows off its bare blood red branches and twigs. In the spring it has clusters of creamy yellow flowers followed by deep rich green leaves above, lighter below. The leaves turn red in the fall. *Cornus stolonifera* 'Flaviramea' (yellowtwig dogwood) has yellow twigs and branches.

Daphne odora (Winter Daphne): an evergreen open shrub that blooms in late winter. The flowers are pink to deep red on the outside and intensely fragrant. The leaves are thick and glossy. It can reach a height of 8 to 10 feet.

Hamamelis mollis (Chinese Witch Hazel): an upright open shrub that can reach 10 to 15 feet. It has fragrant golden-yellow flowers borne on bare branches mid- to late-winter. The leaves are a mid-green turning deep golden yellow in the fall. *Hamamelis vernalis* (Ozark witch hazel, Vernal witch hazel): a smaller suckering shrub reaching about 6 feet. It has sweet-smelling yellow to orange, sometimes red-tinged flowers that are borne in late winter, early spring. Its leaves are green above, grayish below and turn yellow in the fall.

Leycesteria formosa (Himalayan honeysuckle or Himalayan pheasantberry): a plant with arching, suckering, cane-like stems. The flowers are trumpet shaped, carried on pendulous arching racemes. The berries that follow are enclosed in purple leafy sheaths and start out green, turn red and then a purplish black.

Loropetalum chinese 'Razzleberri': a bushy shrub 3 to 6 feet. It has red-violet flowers that are borne intermittently through the year. The olive-green foliage turns a copper-burgundy in the fall.



Mahonia aquifolium (Oregon grape): native to the Pacific Coast. Clusters of blue berries are borne on an evergreen shrub 6 feet tall and 5 feet wide. The leaves are holly shaped and in the cooler months, develop a purplish cast. The 'Compacta' variety grows 2 to 3 feet tall with a spread of 5 feet. *M. repens* (creeping mahonia) has leaves that turn bronze in the winter. It reaches a height of 18 inches and spreads by underground stems.

Pyracantha (firethorn): has clusters of red, orange, or yellow berries the size of peas that remain during the winter months. The plant is evergreen with glossy green leaves and spines. It can range from 10 to 15 feet in height, dependent on variety. Birds are attracted to its edible berries.

Thuja occidentalis 'Rheingold': a slow growing cone-shaped plant to 6 feet that belongs to the arborvitae family. The flat fanlike leaves remain a golden orange throughout the winter. In the spring the leaves have a pink tinge to them.



Prunus X subhirtella 'Autumnalis' (Higan cherry): a spreading deciduous tree to 15 feet. The early pale bronze leaves turn dark green, then yellow in autumn. If the winter is mild, white or pink flowers are borne on the dark knobbed branches intermittently from late fall through winter and into early spring.

The plants above are only the tip of the iceberg. There are azaleas, bamboos, camellias, dianthus, euonymus, fatsia, galantus, holly... The list goes on and on. Winter gardens can be as glorious as summer. Now that your appetite is whetted, check out Our Garden Gang's webpage [The Winter Garden](#) for more ideas, photos and

information. Additionally, Mary Robson, WSU Area Extension Agent has an interesting article, [Gardening: Unusual plants for winter gardens](#), with more planting recommendations and gardens you can visit.

References

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