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Color Up the Winter

For many active gardeners, the winter months are the doldrums that follow the seasons of planting, growing and harvesting. The cold keeps us indoors and the landscape seems a bit blah. But is it really?

If you take time to look around when you're outside walking or driving, there's a lot of seasonal color and interest to catch the eye. It may not be in OUR yards--but it could be!

That's why now is a good time to take note of winter's unique offerings. Write down what you like so you can get some of these plants incorporated into your landscape when it's planting time again.

Color. There's the standard green of pine and spruce trees and many low-growing junipers. Other shades of green show up in broadleaf evergreens like euonymus and groundcovers like tanacetum. Bright color can be found in the red berries of hawthorne trees (see above) and the leafless branches of yellow or red-twig dogwood that pop most against a backdrop of snow.

Texture and Form. The details of bark that get overlooked in the growing season are among nature's subtle gifts to enjoy in winter. Notice the exfoliating bark of the river birch. Shrubs like St. John's wort offer interplay of color, form and texture when dried leaves and seeds continue to cling to colorful stems. When deciduous trees become leafless and "nude," some take on a dramatic winter form. When the Kentucky coffee tree sheds its leaves, for example, you see a new silhouette that's craggy, irregular and punctuated by seed pods.

Movement. In the gusty winds of winter, tall ornamental grasses offer both interest and stately movement especially when grouped in large clumps. Pampas, maiden, feather reed and native bluestem grasses are good choices for putting some motion into your landscape.

The winter-scape may not be as eye-popping as a sea of hot pink petunias. But its subtlety of style is captivating because it resonates with the season's mode of rest, dormancy and rejuvenation. Look around for new ideas so you can bring the best of winter into your yard.

Need help designing a yard with four-season color? Go to www.camelotdesign.net.

*Photo courtesy Jocelyn Chilvers Design.

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