

Color in the Winter Garden

by Sandy Phelps '02

Winter is usually not thought of as the time of year for a beautiful garden. Except for some evergreen shrubs, the landscape looks dreary and lifeless. However, a well-thought-out design plan with plantings for winter interest can transform a garden, turning an ugly duckling into a swan.

Many evergreen shrubs stand out in the winter months when boughs are dusted with the snow. The buds of the **Japanese Andromeda** form and hang like tiny, red-or-cream-colored bells. **Mahonia** have large, dark-green, holly-like leaves and deep-blue berries. The uneven and billowy branches of the **Hinoki Cypress** resemble fluffy clouds when covered with snow. A number of evergreen Viburnums such as the **Leatherleaf** and **Prague** have elongated textured leaves and large, creamy buds waiting to burst open in the warmth of early spring.



Many shrubs lose their leaves but still provide color and texture in the winter landscape with berries of various hues. The small, lavender berries of **Beautyberry** stand out against the



white of snow. **Winterberry** have masses of bright red berries that cover the branches and can easily be seen from a distance. Two deciduous Viburnums, **Cranberry Bush** and **Linden**, burst with large, juicy red berries until discovered by hungry birds.

Not to be forgotten are the unusual plants that bloom in late winter. **Witch Hazel**, such as 'Arnold's Promise,' blooms in late winter sending out a display of yellow, scented flowers. The cascading form of **Winter Jasmine** with its small, yellow flowers stands out against brick or stone walls. The flowering perennial **Hellebore niger**, commonly called the 'Christmas Rose,' has white flowers and evergreen leaves that push through the snow before other plants bloom.

Some of the most outstanding shrubs and trees are those that drop their leaves but have magnificent bark and branches. **Red and Yellow Twig Dogwoods** are V-shaped shrubs with red or yellow branches. **Heritage River Birch** has a soft, ethereal look with tall, upright branches. The barks of the **River Birch** and **Paperbark Birch** have tan-to-salmon-colored bark peeking through their characteristic peeling bark. A large tree needing room to spread is the **Beech**. With its wide, horizontal



branches and gray, "elephant skin" bark, this specimen stands like a sentry in the wintry landscape.

Planting season is still months away. Now is the time to plan a garden that includes some of these trees and shrubs so that it can be enjoyed in all four seasons but especially in winter.