

A Landscape for ALL Seasons

Are you one of those people that visits a garden center in the spring, buys whatever's in bloom, and never visits the center again unless company's coming and you need some annuals for color? Well there's more to enjoy in a landscape than just spring.

Winter

I'm going to begin with winter because the "bones" of the landscape show in winter and this is the best time to see the flaws in your landscape. Bones consist of rocks, evergreens (and evergrasses in a desert climate), ornamental grasses, seed heads, and interesting forms from deciduous plants. If your landscape is uninteresting in the winter, add the missing ingredient from the list above. For rock: add local limestone and granite or reddish field rock with lichens. For evergreens: add conifers, curl leaf mahogany, brooms, mahonias, barberries, cotoneasters, and artemisia sages or for reddish colors add some of the barberries. For ornamental grasses: add muhleys, feather reed grass, little bluestem, grama, Mexican feather grass, and blue avena grass. For seed heads: fernbush, blue mist spirea, yuccas, buckwheats, and sedums like Autumn Joy. For interesting forms, bark, or stem color: multitrunked trees like desert willow, New Mexico olive, crape myrtles (bark), and Mexican elder, or single trunked trees like red bud, walnut, flameleaf sumac, and colored stems like red twig dogwood. Even cacti changes color in winter so add some prickly pear or cholla, or add structural forms like agaves and beargrass. And in late winter your rosemary might bloom.

Summer

Now that the basic landscape structure is set think about adding seasonal color. Summer color comes from blooms like vitex, desert willow, blue mist spirea, roses, creeping germander, butterfly bush, bush morning glory, globe mallows, salvias, lavenders, santolinas, feather dalea or broom dalea, mariola, red yucca, sunflowers, chocolate flower, paperflower, blackfoot daisy, agastaches, sundrops, Mexicali and other summer blooming penstemons, prairie skullcap, gaillardias, verbenas, primroses, prairie zinnias, and don't forget cacti.

Fall

Fall color comes from leaves, berries, and grasses. Good sources of fall leaf color include: Bigtooth maple, Chinese pistache, red oaks, Gambel oak, sumacs, aspens, smoke trees, Raywood ash, mahonias, golden currant, and serviceberry. Fall blooms include: butterfly bushes, cherry sage, goldenrods, asters, agastaches (hyssops), zauschnerias, sedums, chrysanthemums, and dwarf plumbago. Berry sources include: hawthornes, mahonias, cotoneasters, sumacs, and currants. An unusual seedhead for fall is winterfat. The plant is unassuming the rest of the year but puts on a seed head that looks like skinny cotton candy in the fall and it glows in the sun. Grasses include: Lindheimer's muhley, Indian grass (sorghastrum), feather reed grass, blue avena, little bluestem, Mexican feather grass, blue grama, sideoats grama, and Indian rice grass. And there are some fall bulbs like Lycoris or naked lady, colchicums, and fall crocus that add color to your landscape.

So don't be satisfied with a landscape you only enjoy in the spring. You can have color and interest all year round with just a little thought on your part.