

Adding Color to Your Landscape

In the streetscape areas of High Desert, the original landscape designers favored trees and shrubs, but included very few perennials. The trend continued with builder/developer landscapes. My thought in this column is to present some trees, shrubs, perennials, grasses, and desert accents that can be selected and planted for seasonal color and interest. Plants mentioned were chosen from the Approved Plant List. Note that color plants are more noticeable in the landscape when they have foil plants (neutral color) or light-colored walls behind them. Grasses look best when the sun shines through them.

Winter Color

For winter we need to think of evergreens, evergrays, plants with berries, seedheads, interesting bark, and grasses that change shade and get interesting seedheads.

Evergreens/evergrays: dwarf Austrian pine, shrub live oak, barberry/mahonia, cliffrose, lavender, Texas sage, mahogany, manzanita, artemisia, cacti, cholla, agave, yucca, aloe (red yucca)

Fruit/Berries: chokecherry, hawthorne (especially Russian), Mexican elder, NM Olive, Gambel oak, Arizona rosewood, barberry/mahonia, buffaloberry, Nanking cherry, sandcherry, kinnikinnick, prickly pear

Bloom: rosemary

Seedheads: mesquite, redbud, hoptree, sumac (prairie flameleaf and staghorn), vitex, fernbush, curry plant, artemisia, four wing saltbush, blue mist spirea, winterfat, buckwheat, sedum, gayfeather, goldenrod, Mexican hat, desert mules ears, sunflower, salvia (cherry sage), Karl Foerster, blue avena, Indian ricegrass, gramas, Indian grass, muhly grass, alkali sacaton, galleta

Bark: Mexican elder, lacebark elm, red twig dogwood

Grass Color: blue avena, little bluestem, Karl Foerster, blue grama, sideoats grama, Indian grass, sand lovegrass, galleta, and wheatgrass.

Spring Color

For spring think blooms, plumes, and bulbs to add color to your landscape. In High Desert we get our rain in August so most spring blooming plants are adapted plants that typically bloom when those areas get rain, i.e. spring.

Bulbs are often the first messengers of spring and include crocus, daffodils (rabbit proof), tulips, star flower, and bulb iris. There are three "sub-season" bloomers in spring - early season, mid-season, and late season. I personally love to see crocuses and star flower peeking through snow.

Spring blooms and plumes include fragrant ash, hawthornes, goldenball leadtree, redbud, vitex, smoke tree, Mexican elder, barberry/mahonia, cliffrose, feather dalea, manzanitas, salvias, serviceberry, leadplant, lavender, sandcherry, Persian stonecress, buckwheat, catmint, coreopsis, coral bells, primrose, gaura, some penstemons, soapwort, sundrops, verbenas, and veronicas. This is also the time for desert accents like cholla and prickly pear to bloom.

Summer Color

Summer bloomers love heat and include desert willow, littleleaf mock orange, apache plume, fernbush, blue mist spirea, bush morning glory, butterfly bush (petite plum a favorite), desert mules ears, lavenders, red yucca (an aloe), rose of sharon, monardas, blanket flower, chocolate flower, prairie zinnia, purple prairie clover, germanders, giant four o'clock, Mexican hat, more penstemons, pin cushion flower, hummingbird mints (*agastaches* try the bubblegum one), hummingbird trumpet (*zauschneria*), and yuccas. Other favorites of mine include the ornamental oreganos which seem to bloom all summer and Texas sage (*Leucanthum*) which blooms after a rain or an irrigation.

Fall Color

In fall we look primarily to the leaves of trees and shrubs and the changing shades of ornamental grasses for color. Some of my favorites from the list include Raywood ash, hoptree, NM olive, the maples, Texas red oak, pagoda, pistache, smoke tree, poplar (cottonwoods and aspens), chamisa, and sumacs. Interesting shrubs include winterfat with the cotton candy seed heads, mahonia, sand cherry, turpentine bush, and cherry sage. Flowering plants like dwarf plumbago, torch goldenrod, and especially Maximillian sunflower are also favorites.

Although grasses were listed in Winter, the color change begins in the fall so don't forget the ornamental grasses.

With all these possible choices I hope you'll try adding some color to your landscape.