

HAH ROUNDTABLE PROGRAM DECEMBER 19, 2015
"CREATING A WINTER GARDEN"

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Thank you to our participants, who took time out of their busy holiday schedules to attend this session and make it a particularly interesting one. George Biercuk and Bob Luckey thank you for partially defoliating your property to bring so many wonderful samples of evergreen varieties and to speak so informatively about them. Other attendees besides myself were Joan DiMonda, Marie Di Monte, Michael DeVito, Ruth Ferguson Richards, Chris Chapin, Peter Feder, and new faces Peter Belsky, Sarah Alford, and Ronald Lewis.

The question when creating a new winter garden or enhancing what you have is to ask, "once the flowers fade and the leaves are off the trees, what remains in the garden that provides visual interest throughout the long winter months?" If the answer is "not too much," or "not enough," or "I would like even more," the good news is that there is a great variety of plants from which to choose. The best four-season gardens include plants that create structure, or good "bones." Such designs can include high or low hedges from evergreens and dense, deciduous shrubs; plants with architectural forms to provide height and shape; and the hardscaping of stone paths, walls, patios, and terraces. Added to these can be practical as well as decorative elements like trellises, pergolas, arbors, urns, weatherproof containers, benches, and decorative focal points such as outdoor sculptures, fountains, furniture, and obelisks. Also important are texture and shape from the silhouettes and bark of mature, deciduous trees and shrubs; faded but sturdy perennials and grasses; as well as color from certain evergreens, long-lasting berries, and late-winter blooms. Another consideration: what can be viewed from your windows, as you will be spending much of your time indoors during the winter season? One of the joys of gazing at your winter garden is bird watching, so their houses, baths, and feeders are best placed where you can see them.

OVERVIEW: ELEMENTS OF THE WINTER GARDEN

- Evergreen trees and shrubs create the "bones" of your garden with structure, shape, and texture (especially when coated with a light amount of snow), and also provide privacy, windbreaks, and shelter for birds.
- Semi-evergreens
- Tall ornamental grasses for color, shape, and movement
- Deciduous trees and shrubs can display exfoliating bark, multiple trunks, and interesting branch shapes
- Color introduced with berries, winter flowers, and certain evergreens, stems, and foliage
- Berries, dried flowers, pine cones, and sturdy seed heads are left for visual interest and food for birds
- Weatherproof outdoor containers with winter-hardy plantings
- Hardscaping and decorative accessories
- Winter gardens are good sources for indoor decorations

The articles on this subject in many books, magazines and periodicals (we have a terrific "winter interest" folder in our HAH files) include more plants than I have listed. Some are left out because they are either not hardy or do not bloom in winter on the East End, while others are described as having winter interest from other sturdy seed heads, like amsonia, but mine are spent by late fall.

Deer Resistance is indicated by one asterisk (*); two asterisks () indicate the plant is deer-resistant except in winter, when it must be protected. No asterisk means this plant is deer food. These designations pertain to my neighborhood's deer. Your deer may have different tastes. It sounded as if George's deer eat more varieties than usual, and what they don't destroy, his squirrels do...**

EVERGREENS

- Abies (fir)*
- Arum italicum (stays green in winter)*
- Aucuba japonica (Japanese laurel)
- Azalea**
- Buxus (boxwood)* 'Winter Gem' doesn't require protection
- Calluna vulgaris (Scotch heather)*
- Camellia
- Cedrus atlantica (silver blue cedar)*
- Chamaecyparis (false cypress)*
- Cupressus x leylandii (leyland cypress)**
- Cotoneaster*
- Daphne odora (winter daphne)*
- Juniperus virginiana (Eastern red cedar)**
- Magnolia grandiflora 'Edith Bogue'*
- Mahonia*
- Nandina domestica (heavenly bamboo)*
- Osmanthus*
- Picea pungens glauca (Colorado blue spruce)*
- Pieris japonica (andromeda)*
- Pinus (pine)* many varieties
- Prunus laurocerasus (cherry laurel)*
- Pyracantha (firethorn)*
- Rhododendron**
- R. 'P.J.M.' leaves turn bronze in winter**
- Sarcococca (sweet box)*
- Skimmia japonica*
- Taxus (yew)
- Thuja (arborvitae)
- Tsuga (hemlock)

Groundcovers: Ajuga, Ivy, Euonymus (which turns from green to bronze in winter), Myosotis (forget-me-not)*, Pachysandra*, Vinca (periwinkle)*

Among the beautiful examples brought in by George and Bob were: variegated Pieris 'Flaming Silver,' Thuja occidentalis 'Rheingold' - which is noted for its golden foliage, variegated Boxwood, variegated Leyland Cypress 'Silver Dust,' Skimmia japonica, Osmanthus, and several more.

SEMI-EVERGREENS

Some shrubs and trees hold on to most of their browned or bronzed leaves throughout winter. This is called 'marcescence,' and includes such varieties as Carpinus (hornbeam), Quercus (oaks, especially 'pin,') Fagus (beech), and privet. In addition, there are some, including perennials, that stay green or turn silver:

- Abelia x grandiflora*
- Artemisia*
- Berberis x gladwynensis 'William Penn'*
- Daphne x burkwoodii*
- Lavender*
- Leucanthemum x superbum (shasta daisy)*
- Liriope
- Papaver* (Oriental poppy -the leaves die back in the summer and then re-emerge in fall and persist through the winter)
- Geranium macrorrhizum*
- Stokesia (stokes aster)
- woody herbs* thyme and sage

TALL ORNAMENTAL GRASSES*

Calamagrostis 'Karl Foerster," Miscanthus (maiden grass), Erianthus ravennae (plume grass), Panicum vergatum (switch grass) are tall enough not to be covered by snow. We discussed the fact that Miscanthus can be invasive and messy as the winter winds deteriorate the plant. If it is to be kept all winter, it is suggested that it be tied up to keep it in place.

DECIDUOUS TREES AND SHRUBS

Trees

- Shape - espaliered fruit trees, acer palmatum, and others with beautiful silhouettes
- Multiple trunks - crabapple, cornus kousa, and crape myrtle
- Exfoliating bark - crape myrtle, acer griseum (paperbark maple), birch, hydrangea quercifolia, stewartia, cornus kousa
- Colorful bark - birch, acer palmatum, acer griseum, cherry
- Weeping branches of certain cherries and willows

Shrubs whose dense branches create barrier, privacy, or low hedges or have attractive shapes:

- Berberis*
- Corylus avellana* (Harry Lauder's Walking Stick)
- Forsythia*
- Carpinus (hornbeam)
- Privet
- Spirea*
- Viburnum* (generally deer-resistant after flowering)

Note that Berberis thunbergii is on the invasive plant list in New York and is no longer supposed to be sold. This is unfortunate in my opinion, as it has so many wonderful attributes.

COLOR IN THE WINTER GARDEN

Winter Berries: Many trees and shrubs produce berries and other attractive fruit in summer and fall, but some have berries that persist throughout winter. These berries are either hard or bitter in autumn, but become palatable only after persistent cold, thereby maintaining a winter food source for birds. A (d) indicates the plant is dioecious, meaning that at least one male plant is required to produce berries on the female plants.

- Amelanchier arborea (serviceberry)*
- Aucuba (d)
- Aronia arbutifolia (red chokeberry)*
- Aronia malanocarpa (black chokeberry)*
- Berberis*
- Callicarpa*
- Cotoneaster*
- Crataegus viridis 'Winter King' (hawthorn)*
- Gaultheria (wintergreen)*
- Ilex opaca (American holly tree)** (d)
- Ilex** glabra (inkberry), x meserveae, serrata (Japanese winterberry) (d)
- Ilex verticillata (deciduous winterberry)** (d)
- Juniperus virginiana (Eastern red cedar)**
- Malus (crabapple)
- Myrica Pensylvanica (northern bayberry)* silver-gray berries (technically "drupes")
- Nandina domestica*
- Pyracantha (firethorn)*
- Rose hips
- Skimmia japonica* (d)
- Yew (red berries, technically "drupes")(d)
- Viburnum trilobum (American cranberry bush) *

Color from branches

- Acer palmatum (Japanese maple)- some have red branches in winter
- Betula (birch)
- Cornus (dogwood) alba, sanguinea, and sericea, have red or yellow stems in winter, with proper pruning
- Salix integra 'haruro nishiki' (willow) -red winter branches, with proper pruning

Color from foliage:

- Aucuba japonica
- Chamaecyparis pisifera 'Gold Mop'*
- Picea (spruce)*
- Sub-shrubs turn silver
- Thuja (arborvitae) chinensis

Color from winter flowers:

- Bulbs - crocus, galanthus (snowdrops)
- Corylopsis (winter hazel)*
- Daphne odora (winter daphne)*
- Edgeworthia chrysantha (paperbush)* fragrant blooms in February-March before leaves develop
- Eranthus hyemalis (winter aconite)
- Erica carnea (winter heath)* blooms January-March
- Hamamelis vernalis (vernal witch hazel)*
- Helleborus* foetidus and niger (Christmas rose)*
- Jasminium nudiflorum (winter jasmine)*
- Mahonia bealei (leatherleaf mahonia)*
- Skimmia japonica* (the males, although they do not fruit, have large, dusty-rose flowers from fall throughout winter).

*Although Camellia sasanqua's common name is winter camellia, our members say that it blooms only through late Fall in our area. However, George was able to bring in a sample bloom on this very mild December 19th.

DRIED FLOWER AND SEED HEADS, NUTS, AND PINE CONES

- Acorns
- Agastache*
- Astilbe*
- Buddleia (butterfly bush)*
- Caryopteris*
- Clematis
- Echinacea (coneflower)
- Echinops (globe thistle)*
- Eryngium (sea holly)*
- Hibiscus
- Hydrangea
- Lagerstroemia (crape myrtle)
- Ornamental Grasses*
- Perovskia (Russian sage)*
- Pine cones
- Quercus (oak)*
- Rudbeckia (black-eyed Susan)
- Sedum
- Sumac

HARDSCAPING

- Stone patios, terraces, paths, driveways, walls, dry streams, ornamental rocks

OUTDOOR DECORATIVE STRUCTURES

- Benches
- Bird baths, houses, feeders
- Fountains (winterized of course)
- Gazebos
- Pergolas, trellises, urns, pedestals, gates, arbors, arches, entry columns, weather vanes, and obelisks
- Sculpture

OUTDOOR CONTAINERS

If you have weatherproof containers they can be planted with just about any small, winter-hardy plant from many items on the lists above. Combining varying heights, textures, and colors are keys to visual appeal. I showed one photograph of a container that combines ilex, helleborus, variegated liriopse, and wintergreen.

ITEMS FROM YOUR GARDEN FOR INDOOR DECORATIONS

- Begonia leaves
- Berries
- Branches
- Evergreen boughs and cuttings
- Herb leaves such as sage and rosemary
- Pine cones
- Roses (dried)
- Seashells
- Seed heads from echinacea, eryngium, echinops

Tip: fill the bottom of a vase or container with pine needles, small rocks from your garden, seashells, or glass mulch (this latter seen in *Martha Stewart Living*)

Another tip from *Martha Stewart Living*: anything can be spray-painted silver and gold.

Our late member Susan Seidman once suggested that where possible, you should remove any lingering mildew, pollen, or insects by soaking items in a diluted bleach solution and then air-drying them. Pine cones can be put in the oven at 250 degrees fahrenheit for an hour. One can also add a coat of polyurethane to give them shine.

Susan also suggested that we could take cuttings from our evergreens and pot them up for indoor enjoyment. Last year I did this in the wood planters I have on my deck so they wouldn't look so empty during the winter. Spruce cuttings lasted especially well, but all were attractive throughout the winter.

Last Tip: mulch your garden beds either with wood mulch from the nursery or with your own mulched leaves. Among other benefits, this will give your garden beds a finished look for the winter.