

Fine Gardening brings out the Artist in You!

Although many gardeners don't consciously think about it, gardening is an art form. You use the same elements of line, color, texture and form as would a painter or sculptor. You also have other elements (e.g., fragrance, sounds, temperature, birds and butterflies) that other artists don't have. Another difference is that gardening deals with living things, so your work of art is never "finished." The joy is in the imaginative artistic process as much as in the final product. Here are some design suggestions you may want to consider in building your own work of art.

Multiple Season Plants

One way to keep your garden beautiful year around is to use plants with multiple season interest. Think about more than just the flowers. Consider foliage, bark, fragrance and form. Some plants change their appearance dramatically at different times of the year. Others come into their glory during the winter when many plants are dormant or drab. There are thousands of kinds of plants that grow well in Western Washington, so I can't describe all of their year around characteristics. Using my impeccable taste, I have selected the following few for description here, but there are many other multiple-season plants. (And, there are those few folks who consider my taste to be quite peccable.)

Coral Bark Maple (*Acer palmatum* 'Sango Kaku.') This relatively small upright tree has red bark year around. The bark is brightest in fall and winter and is best in full sun. It has small light green leaves that turn a reliable golden yellow in fall. The foliage always contrasts beautifully with the bark. Like all Japanese maples it requires good drainage and resents soggy ground. It can grow to be 20' tall in time. There are several other varieties of Japanese maples and one variety of vine maple that also have red bark and yellow fall color.

Dwarf Deodar Cedars (*Cedrus deodara* dwarf varieties.) Conifer fanciers have selected many varieties of deodar cedars that remain small--unlike the species, which will become a large tree. "Cream Puff" is a beautiful one with blue-green internal needles and almost white new growth at the branch tips. I have one in my garden that is about 9' tall. I shear the branch tips in late winter, which causes it to grow still more branches with the beautiful light tips when new growth starts. Other ones are "Deep Cove" and "Snow Sprite" which can be grown as spreading shrubs by removing any branch that would become an upright leader. They could also be trained into small trees by staking up a leader. They grow very slowly so they are easily kept in bounds. In tree form, they can get to be 10' tall in time. Shrub form can be kept at 3' x 4'. All are beautiful year around, but stunning in spring when the new growth comes out.

"Winter Flame" and "Midwinter Fire" Dogwoods (*Cornus sanguinea* varieties.)

These two named varieties are light years more beautiful than other red-twig dogwoods. In the summer, both have yellow-green foliage and small clusters of tiny white flowers. They come into their own in winter when the leaves fall off and the stems become very bright. "Winter Flame" has bright hunter orange stems and "Midwinter Fire" has bright yellow stems with bright red tips. Both are especially stunning against a dark evergreen background or planted with white barked birches. Both should be cut back nearly to the

ground in early spring when new growth begins. This keeps them at about 4' x 4' and causes them to produce all new branches which will be brightest the following winter.

Corylopsis (*Corylopsis spicata* and *C. pauciflora*.) These are two beautiful species of winter hazel that bloom in late winter (before they leaf out) when everyone is hungry for spring flowers. They grow relatively slowly at first, but can become 6' in time. Spike Winter Hazel (*C. spicata*) has short clusters of 6 to 12 pale yellow flowers at joints along the stems and rounded blue-green leaves with an interesting texture. Buttercup Winter Hazel (*C. pauciflora*) has green textured leaves and profuse smaller clusters of pale yellow flowers. It also grows slower to a smaller ultimate size than *C. spicata*. Both plants prefer partial shade and look good against a dark evergreen background. Fall color for both species is a pleasant butter yellow.

Contorted Filbert (*Corylus avellana contorta* "Harry Lauder's Walking Stick.") With its curiously contorted branches festooned with many long catkins, this shrub is at its most decorative in winter. Look for one that is grown on its own root so all of the suckers that come up from the roots will also be contorted. (If you buy grafted ones, you will need to cut the suckers off because they will be straight.) Unpruned, this shrub can get to 8' x 8' in time but it can be kept smaller with regular pruning. Cut branches make nice additions to flower arrangements. Grown in a large frost proof stoneware pot, it is a showy winter deck plant of smaller stature.

Cryptomeria "Elegans" and "Elegans Aurea" (*Cryptomeria japonica* varieties) These are two varieties of evergreen that are often sold as "Japanese plume cedars." They both have soft fluffy summer needles. "Elegans" is blue green in summer and turns deep burgundy in winter. "Elegans Aurea" has a yellow cast to the needles that gets brighter in winter. Both are small trees that can grow slowly to perhaps 30' x 10' in time.

Cryptomeria "Sekkan Suji" (*Cryptomeria japonica* variety.) This is another variety of Japanese cedar that has dark green inner needles and lemon yellow branch tips. The bright colors remain year around, but containerized and newly planted trees sometimes take on an amber color in winter. Weather in the low 'teens can cause some frost damage to branch tips, but the plant recovers quickly in spring. We shear ours in spring to keep it at 9' x 4' and to cause it to produce more bright branch tips.

Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis intermedia*) is a large shrub or small tree with fringe shaped flowers that hang from the bare zig-zag branches in winter. "Diane" has dark red flowers, "Jelena" has copper orange flowers and "Arnold Promise" has bright yellow flowers. All have bright orangy-red fall color with some overlay of burgundy and maroon.

Pyracantha (*Pyracantha hybrids*) This versatile evergreen shrub can be grown as a hedge plant or espaliered flat against a wall or fence to provide color for long periods. Grow in full sun and do not overwater to avoid possible diseases. I grow the "Mojave" variety as a 3' hedge in my garden, but it can grow to 6' or more if left unpruned. In spring it has many clusters of small white flowers against the dark green foliage. The flowers turn into clusters of bright orange berries in fall. The bright berries remain on the plant all winter until the robins return in spring. Then they disappear in about a week!

Benches, Birdbaths, Containers, Lanterns and Statuary

Garden art can add focal points and class to your garden year around. Place benches in partial shade near something to view while sitting on them. Place lanterns or statuary in niches in the garden or at pathway junctions. If you have more than one lantern or statue, place them far enough apart so they won't compete—ideally out of sight from each other. Lanterns and statuary can be placed on a raised flat stone to add height and emphasis. Place birdbaths in the sun and away from bushes that can provide cover for predators like cats. Birdbaths with low sloping sides also attract butterflies. Container plantings are great on patios and decks or as accents in the garden itself. In the garden, use pot feet or put them on a raised rock to ensure good drainage.

These are just a few of the endless possibilities to make your garden a work of art. Now go outside and play!

Contributed by Larry Lael

He and wife Bethany Lael own Laels Moon GardenNursery in Rochester