The Winter Landscape

When most of us landscape, we think about how plants are going to look while they are in bloom or how the different leaves and colors and textures are going to compliment each other against the background of a house, fence or other shrubs.

Landscaping for a pleasing view during the growing season is our goal and we have gotten pretty competent at achieving that goal. But, the house, lawn and plants do not just disappear with the first killing frost. The idea of having a varied and visually pleasing landscape during the winter months is a perspective that many of us have never considered before. Well, let's consider it now.

There are three points to consider when looking at the winter landscape:

- form is the foundation
- a little color goes a long way
- observe and take notes

Without leaves, flowers, plumes and bright colors, what is left to make a landscape interesting? One of the identifiable things would be the silhouettes and textures of the plants that are growing. So, in order to have some interesting forms present in the landscape, think about what kinds of plants have interesting forms. Conical shapes of conifers such as dwarf alberta spruce or gnarled shapes like japanese maple or corkscrew willow are some good examples.

Plants with good winter color such as Firepower dwarf nandina or Blue star juniper or even one of the many different arborvitaes would provide good color against a dormant landscape background. Winter flowering shrubs such as Sasanqua camellia and trees with decorative back like river birch or crape myrtle would show up well in the winter landscape. Hollies that have bright berries should be considered as well as red twig dogwood or decorative grasses.

Combinations of these plants and others can make the winter garden a place of beauty and interest. There are many good landscape plants that have an abundance of merits for any time of the year but some take on particular value when they can add some needed pizzazz on a dreary winter day.

The last point to consider when thinking about the winter landscape is to observe and take notes. Look over the landscape during the winter and think about ways it could be made more interesting. Then set out in search of plants that will not only compliment the garden in the summer but will do double duty for winter.
Timing Is Important When Pruning

Pruning trees is a complex project and the long term health of the tree depends on getting a knowledgeable and experienced person to do your pruning work. If you plan on doing the pruning yourself, it would be advisable to obtain some information on pruning techniques and guidelines before making the first cut.

Pruning should be done for several reasons: removing dead or damaged limbs, enhancing the shape of the tree, better flowering or fruiting and keeping the tree to a manageable size. Pruning and shaping should start when a tree is young. This will prevent later problems that will be more expensive to fix.

Most pruning should be done when trees are dormant. There is less weight on the limbs at this time, and the framework of the branches is easier to see. Some trees however, such as maple, birch, honey locust, dogwood, elm and walnut, are bleeder trees. This means that they bleed excessive amounts of sap in the early spring. While this is harmless to the tree, it can be an alarming sight to the homeowner. These trees would be better pruned in the summer. They may be pruned in the early fall if necessary but summer would be better. Trees in the genus, prunus, such as cherry and peach are susceptible to bacterial canker if pruned in the fall and early winter and should be pruned in the spring and summer. Timing is also very important when pruning dogwoods. Dogwood borers are very active during May, June and July and cuts should never be made on dogwood trees during these months.

One of the most harmful tree practices known is called topping. Also called heading, hat-racking, dehorning or scalping, this technique is used frequently to reduce the size of a tree and is common in this area. Topping usually removes 50-100% of the leaf bearing crown of the plant. When the leaves are removed, the tree can actually starve. This triggers the rapid growth of new leaf bearing shoots which can severely weaken and sometimes even kill the tree. These rapidly growing shoots are very weak and are prone to breakage in windy conditions. A tree that has been topped can never fully regain its natural form.

When large trees need to be pruned, it is advisable to hire a professional arborist. When selecting an arborist consider these things:

• Membership is professional organizations
• Certification through the Certified Arborist program
  • Proof of insurance
  • A list of references-check them!

Pruning trees is serious business and careful thought should be given to the outcome of this project.
Pruning Blueberries

Blueberries are one of the most maintenance free of all the small fruits that can be grown by home gardeners. These long-lived plants will bear for many years and if fertilizer needs are provided for and correct pruning is maintained, the yields should be substantial. Plants should produce about ½ pound of fruit per bush by the third year and mature plants can easily produce 12 to 25 pounds of blueberries on each plant.

Fertilizer needs for plants vary because of size. While a new plant needs only one tablespoon of 10-10-10 per plant at six-week intervals, a bearing plant should be given one cup of 10-10-10 every six weeks until July 1. Fertilizer should not be applied in the spring until the first leaves have reached full size.

Pruning helps to control the size of the bush and increases fruit size. It also encourages new, vigorous growth on which next year’s fruit is borne. When a new bush is planted it should be pruned back severely when planted. Older plants should be top pruned in late July to control the height of the bush. During the winter, old canes and tall shoots should be cut back to force branching at a lower level. Try to take out old canes in the center of the plant to increase air movement. Remember that flowers are borne on 1-year-old wood so pruning is essential to promote new growth each year. This year's pruned branches will provide next year's fruit.

Blueberries get ripe about two months after they bloom. Berries continue to grow in size and flavor after they turn blue. Fruit should not be picked until it is fully ripe, three to six days after turning blue.

It is time to thin old canes here in Burke County. Yearly pruning and thinning keeps plants in top producing shape. Remember that only old canes from the middle of the bush should be pruned at this time. Take canes out at ground level. Top pruning is done in late July after harvest is over.

If you would like to add some blueberries to your garden call our office at 439-4460 to place an order during our small fruit sale, which runs through the end of February. We have blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, muscadines, peaches, apples, pears and cherries available for purchase.

Call our office for a copy of the
Burke County Pruning Calendar
439-4460

Spring Great Outdoors Expo
March 3rd & 4th
Collett Street Recreation Center
Lawn & Garden Vendors & Workshops
This Good Earth

Lawn Care

Control Next Spring’s Weeds Now

It’s cold out there, for sure but it’s still a great time to work on the lawn. Winter weeds are up and growing and they need to be taken care of before they flower and disperse seeds. Winter annuals are those that plague our nice, green spring lawns. Chickweed, henbit, hairy bittercress and many others pop up in the spring but when homeowners notice them, it is too late to do anything about them.

Winter annuals sprout in the fall and grow throughout the winter. By late winter and early spring they flower and make seeds. These seeds lie on the ground until next fall and then start the whole cycle again. When hot weather arrives, winter annuals die back on their own, leaving their seeds. Applying an herbicide in the spring doesn’t help the winter annual problem at all because the seeds have already been dispersed.

But, from now until early spring, winter weeds can be sprayed and killed before seeds are formed, breaking the never-ending cycle of winter annual weeds. As long as the day temperature reaches 55 degrees, herbicides will work on actively growing winter weeds. Apply when rain is not expected within twenty-four hours. Weed b Gon Max is just one of the herbicides that can be sprayed on a lawn for these weeds. Read the label for a list of weeds that will be controlled by any herbicide you are considering purchasing.

Take care of winter annuals now while they can still be controlled. It will make your spring lawn free from pesky winter visitors.

Mark Calendar For Crabgrass Control

For many homeowners, crabgrass control is a major concern each year. One of the biggest problems of controlling crabgrass is that when you see the problem growing in your lawn, it is too late to do anything about it.

Crabgrass is an annual weed which means that it lives for one growing season, disburse seeds and dies. Limited control can be maintained by keeping the seed heads mowed off before seeds are distributed, but this is very hard to do. Crabgrass can put on several seed heads in one season and your chances of getting them all mowed off at the right time are not good.

The most successful method of control has been found to be prevention. This means that the seeds should not be allowed to germinate in the spring. There are herbicides available to the homeowner that prevent crabgrass seeds from germinating in the spring. The trick is to get it applied to the lawn before the seeds start to sprout in the spring. Most crabgrass preventers are effective for about three months. Sometimes it helpful to put out a second application after three months to extend the control period.

Depending on the weather, crabgrass seeds can germinate anytime from early February to mid April. So, a safe plan of action would be to apply crabgrass preventer in the beginning of February and again in early May. That would give a good six months of control and by the time any stray seeds tried to germinate, the lawn should be growing vigorously so that the crabgrass will be too shaded to germinate. Another method is to get a preventer out just prior to germination of crabgrass. Seeds germinate when soil temperature rises to 55 degrees for several days. It can be risky trying to keep a check on soil temperature but there is another factor that can be used. Forsythia (yellow bells) blooms when soil temperatures are 55 degrees so as long as you get your preventer out by the time the forsythia blooms, you're okay.

Prevention is the most successful method of control for crabgrass. But, even though you get good control for one year, there will always be isolated patches of crabgrass. It is an ongoing problem that can never be completely abolished. But, with proper timing the home lawn can be kept relatively free of this very pesky weed. Mark your calendar now and get out those crabgrass preventers on time.

“A weed is but an unloved flower”
Ella Wheeler Wilcox
**It’s Vole Hunting Season**

Most folks do not even know what voles are, but anyone who has ever experienced the devastation that voles can cause will never forget them. Voles are in the rodent family and look like mice. There are two types of voles: the pine vole, which is about three inches long and the meadow vole, which is about five inches long.

Homeowners don’t usually realize that voles are present until they begin seeing damage in their landscapes and flowerbeds. They eat bulbs and roots and even the trunks of small ornamentals. Plants will begin to wilt and will be completely loose in the ground where the vole has eaten the roots or bulbs. They can also girdle trees and are a particular nuisance to apple growers.

Pine voles do most of their damage under the ground. They live in burrows and only come out at night. They dig holes about 1 1/2 inches in diameter right beside the plants they destroy. They will however come out long enough to scurry to another burrow and sometimes their trails are visible. Pine voles are probably more of a problem in this area than meadow voles.

Meadow voles do their damage above ground and can kill trees by eating the bark all the way around the trunk at ground level. Close inspection will show teeth grooves in the wood.

Pine voles do the most damage to home plantings. They are active year round and the trick to controlling them is to set mousetraps by their holes baited with raw apple pieces. Cover the trap and hole with a bucket. The trap and hole must be covered because pine voles do not come above ground. The timing is also very important. Trapping is most successful when done between November and March when plants are dormant and food is scarce.

Meadow voles are more easily controlled by keeping all tall grass and weeds mown away from the base of trees. Be sure and keep mulch raked back from the base of ornamental trees. They can quickly kill a mature Bradford pear. Excessive mulch is a perfect vole habitat.

Tour your landscape and flowerbeds often and watch for holes and wilted plants. If you suspect that there are voles present start trapping them. These varmints are smart but you can win if you persevere.

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**Almost Time To Plant Early Veggies**

It’s the dead of winter but those early vegetables need to get in the ground pretty soon here in Burke County. Early crops generally have few insect and disease problems and quickly make way for main season selections when warm weather arrives. The trick, however is getting those plants in the ground at the proper time. Plant too early and the cold gets them but plant too late and the heat ruins the harvest.

Here are some of the more popular early selections and the planting windows for them. Why not give some early crops a try this year:

- Onion sets-first planting mid-March
- Peas-first planting third week of March
- Cabbage-first planting April 1
- Irish potatoes-first planting last week in March
- Broccoli-first planting April 1
- Leaf lettuce-first planting second week in April

It’s nice to know when to plant and the Extension office has a great planting guide available for early, mid-season and fall crops. These handy pocket guides can be used in any part of the U.S. and give great information such as planting dates, expected harvest dates, planting depth and much more. The cost of this garden planner is $5 and can be picked up at the Extension office, located at 130 Ammons Dr. in Morganton.
Pesticide Recertification Classes
2 hours credit each

February 7, 2012
10:00 - 12:00
Categories: ABGHIJKLMNOTDX
1:00 - 3:00
Category: V

March 13, 2012
10:00 - 12:00
Category: V
1:00 - 3:00
Categories: ABGHIJKLMNOTDX

September 18, 2012
10:00 - 12:00
Categories: ABGHIJKLMNOTDX
1:00 - 3:00
Category: V

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