

Using Berries for Winter Interest

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Winter time can be a less than desirable time of year for many landscapes. We can enjoy many colors and shapes during our growing season, but as we all realize that can be the shortest part of the year and so what can we do to extend our enjoyment of our landscaping? Shrubs and small trees can help fill for this time of year, by providing color and texture to the landscape and to provide habitat/food for birds. I would like to discuss some of the possibilities that can be used in Wyoming.

If we look at our native shrubs, such as chokecherry, native plum, buffalo berry, Elderberry (black and blue varieties are edible the red variety are poisonous), Hawthorn, Serviceberry, Wild rose's. These shrubs have been around for a long time and are used by some but could be used more in landscaping designs. There are some precautions with these, since most can spread like the chokecherry, or spreading roses, so they are best planted in a mass planting area and do not work as well as a single ornamental planting, but with some maintenance this can happen. There are several varieties of Serviceberry and Hawthorn along with the spreading roses.

A very nice small tree is the New Mexico privet (*Forestiera neomexicana*) or Desert Olive. This small tree or large shrub has blue-black fruit, with a light grey smooth bark, reminding me of Aspens. It prefers a well-drained soil, but is very drought tolerant, and is what I would recommend as a replacement for Russian Olives.

The Mountain Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos oreophilus*), has very nice white berries. This plant would be a very good candidate for a backdrop plant and is also very drought tolerant and prefers a well-drained soil. This is a shorter plant so it can be placed under larger plants or in areas where height is a consideration. The birds like these berries but they can be poisonous to people.

The smooth sumac family of shrubs have a pyramid shaped seed head which is a red hairy texture that stays on most of the year. The full size variety can get fairly large, but there are dwarf varieties available. These are very drought tolerant and very hardy shrubs. You also get some nice red colors from the leaves in the fall.

One of the older standby shrubs is the Red-osier Dogwoods. These plants not only have a nice reddish colored bark but also produce small berrylike drupes in clusters that are white. This medium sizes shrub does spread but will do very well in a higher ph soil condition and it is pretty fast growing, and there are quite a few varieties to choose from.

The other small tree seen in many parts of Wyoming is the Mountain Ash. This tree is very hardy provides fall leave color, and has clusters of red fruit in the fall and winter. The birds will enjoy this tree and there are several varieties to choose from depending on what your preferences are. This tree is also very tolerant of Wyoming's alkaline soils.

While you are planning your landscaping ideas this winter take note of where you could place one or several of the plants mentioned here or others you might find in catalogs or while you are visiting nurseries. Look out your windows especially those where you can sit and view, this will give you an ideas of a fun spring time activity.

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