



Green

By Anne McKeon

Fingers

There is absolutely no reason why your winter garden should not look as good, if not better, than your summer display. It's all in the planning.



Pyracantha Orange Glow brightens any winter garden

By autumn and early winter your beds and borders can look worn out and generally past their sell by date, particularly if you opted to plant annual bedding plants and herbaceous flowers. In my opinion it is better to concentrate on shrubs, trees, heathers and so on. In other words, plant more permanent vegetation for an all year round effect, only injecting annuals for a quick fix of additional summer colour.

For years the use of ground cover planting seemed to have lost favour but in this era of 'no free time' easy maintenance is the order of the day and so the return of ground cover shrubbery. A bit like bell bottom trousers really, once in fashion, then despised and now back in vogue again! Aside from the obvious advantage of weedcontrol, ground cover plants are also very useful in that they are relatively unaffected by poor weather conditions. Consider them in your winter layout.

Colours can be as important in winter as in summer though much thought should be given to your choices, as colours vary considerably in the low light of winter. Winters are invariably wet so it is worth bearing in mind that wet conditions strengthen some colours, bringing out dense dark browns, silvers and mossy greens.

'Variety is the spice of life' and so it should be in your garden. Near the edge or front of beds plant low clumping plants such as *Bergenia cordifolia* (St. Patrick's Cabbage), *Senecio monroi*, *Ozothamnus ledifolius* (Kerosene plant), the heavily perfumed *Sarcococca humilis*, lime tolerant *Erica carnea* (winter flowering heather), *Taxus Summergold* (ground cover Yew conifer) and so on. Mid-way into beds consider *Cornus Midwinter Fire* (low - mid sized Dogwood), *Salix wehrhahanii*, (mid sized bush Willow), *Pittosporum Abbottsbury Gold*, *Thuja Smaragd*, (lime green conifer) etc. To the back of your bed or border again consider *Cornus* (Dogwood types) along with *Viburnum Tinus*, *Euonymus alatus*, *Pittosporum Silver Queen*, *Astelia Silver Spear*, *Cotoneaster salicifolia*, *Ilex aquifolium* (Holly) and so on. Again the choices are endless.

If planting trees, consider *Eucalyptus niphophila* (Snow Gum) or from the many ornamental crab apple types such as *Malus Golden Hornet* or *Malus John Downey* or possibly from the large family of Rowan/Mountain Ash trees such as *Sorbus Commixta* or *Sorbus Joseph Rock*.

Most plants are sociable, enjoying the company of others, though some are loners and should be planted alone in order to thrive. Bulbs are definitely not the 'Jimmy no Mates' of the plant world as they make excellent companions. They grow quite happily and look stunning when dotted among shrubs and under trees in the winter garden. Suitable bulbs for winter and early spring effect would be *Narcissi* (particularly I think, dwarf Daffodil types), *Snowdrops* *Anemone blanda*, *Cyclamen coum* and *Allium*.



Chaenomoleo Knap Hill Scarlet for late winter – early spring effect



Betula Jacquemonti with its beautiful winter branches, not forgetting its snow white bark

Ideally bulbs should be planted in clumps/groups rather than individually for best visual effect.

A winter garden also benefits greatly by including good architectural structures and varying textures such as gates, hedging, bark mulched surfaces, statuary, pots and so on. Personally, I have a great love of old gates. They add mystery to a garden and look particularly well on frosty winter mornings or clothed with a gown of snow.



My own garden wearing its winter coat

Tubs and pots can be used either in their emptied or planted forms, looking beautiful in any winter scene. In my opinion, if you cannot find a plant to do a nice pot justice then it is better to leave the pot unplanted in order to highlight it's own particular beauty. Statuary in the garden becomes very evident in the winter garden whereas it can be disguised over the summer months with foliage and flowers. Be tasteful in your choice of statues please.

Dress up in your thermals this winter, brave the elements and venture outdoors to create a winter wonderland in your garden.

Happy Gardening!

Anne.



Liquidamber Styraciflua comes to life in late autumn when the green leaves turn fiery red



Erica carnea, heathers and mixed conifers can be very colourful from November to April

Safe Cross Codes in the Garden.

Without wishing to cause panic, I would like to remind you that for all its beauty being in the garden does require that you pay attention to safety. Caution cannot be thrown to the wind just because you are relaxed outdoors.

To start with the obvious, water is a known hazard if abused. Choose water features carefully. Cover ponds with a grid or avoid them altogether as they tend to attract, young, curious children. Always use a qualified electrician when installing pumps and lighting. This is no time to try to save a few euro by doing it yourself.

We all know how important it is to keep

weed killers and other such like chemicals under lock and key. However 'knowing' the importance of and 'doing' are two different things. People can be so lazy when it come to locking things away and even more slack when it comes to their use. Always wear protective clothing when applying chemicals. A mask and gloves are so simple to pull on and off yet how many people wear them? They are not fashion accessories so who cares how you look? It is all about staying safe and healthy not about impressing the passers-by.

Chemicals are only one source of poison in the garden. Bear in mind that some plants produce poisonous berries. It is safer to avoid these plants altogether if you have children. Some children will not eat anything that has not first been doused in tomato sauce but others will nibble at anything. For that reason, I feel that avoiding the offending plants is the safer option. It is better to be safe than sorry. If you are unsure about any plant ask about it before you buy it.

When operating strimmers always wear goggles and turn machines off when clearing blockages. Keep all machinery out of the reach of children. Whatever about walking under ladders being bad luck working from unstable ladders can definitely bring misfortune. Never be afraid to ask a friend to hold the ladder for you. Plastic stoppers



Cotoneaster Wat Pendula, a must-have for winter effect

or wine corks placed over the tops of bamboo canes are a good way to protect your eyes.

I hope that I have not frightened you away from the garden. I want you to be able to enjoy the pleasures of the outdoors.... but in safety.

Be Safe!

Garden Checklist

- ✓ Even still you have time to plant spring bulbs like Tulips, Daffodils and Fritillaria.
- ✓ Remove fallen leaves from pathways and lawn areas and place in some corner of the garden. These will provide insects for robins and other small birds. Leave fallen leaves around base of trees.
- ✓ Leave flower beds undisturbed during the winter. Flowers that have yellowing or fallen leaves or have hollow stems are providing homes for ladybirds.
- ✓ If virginian creepers and ivy plants have become overgrown, trim back now approx 3ft away from gutters.

- ✓ Begin feeding birds once the weather gets cold, as food supplies may be limited except for berried shrubs.
- ✓ Keep ponds free from ice for birds to drink from.
- ✓ If ground is frost free plant bare root roses and trees now.
- ✓ Take hardwood cuttings of trees and shrubs. Cuttings to be 12inches – 14inches long and pencil thick. Make a slanted cut under a bud and plant outdoors into soil mixture that includes some coarse sand.
- ✓ Check that tree ties and stakes are secure.
- ✓ Divide perennial plants. They make great gifts for gardening friends.
- ✓ Prune summer/autumn flowering heathers. These should be pruned lightly. No short back and sides please!
- ✓ Make use of your winter evenings by doing some armchair gardening.

ANNE MCKEON OF GUM DEARG TEORANTA

Buaile Beag, Bearna, Galway operates a Garden Design & Advisory Service. Anne presents a gardening spot on Galway Bay FM radio each Thursday morning at 11.40am approx. and writes gardening articles for various publications. To date Anne has also written two gardening books, one for adult beginner gardeners (*Don't Forget Your Shovel*) and one for children (*Green Acres - Hobby Gardening For Children*).

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