

**EQUIPMENT  
TRENDS**

**AMERICAN  
YELLOWWOOD**

**WORKFORCE  
INITIATIVES**

# the **SCOOP**

## **CREATING WINTER INTEREST**

**PLUS:**  
**WHAT TO DO  
WITH PLASTICS**

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**5 QUICK TIPS FOR  
PARTING WAYS WITH  
EMPLOYEES**



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## Creating

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# WINTER INTEREST

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WINTER IS A QUIET TIME OF YEAR IN THE LANDSCAPE. The perennials are no longer blooming, the pollinators have begun hibernating and the plants are dormant. A blanket of snow covers the landscape and allows us to take a break from outdoor landscaping activities. We often miss the lush green growth of summer and eagerly wait for spring when the landscape will burst into bloom once again.

**Our client's landscapes** look very different this time of year, but with some planning and creativity their landscape can be just as beautiful as it was in summer. Winter interest refers to plants that look good during the winter months, and some of these plants look their best during the winter. We will be looking at several trees, shrubs, and perennials that will enhance your client's winter landscape and make the long winter months more enjoyable for them.

### Trees

As a young man growing up in Wisconsin, my favorite tree in our yard was a River Birch (*Betula nigra*). The River Birch is well known for its beautiful exfoliating bark that is especially stunning during winter. The peeling bark has different shades of colors that stand out nicely in the snowy landscape. River Birch is often planted with clumps of

2–5 stems, which maximize the impact of the peeling bark. River birch are beautiful trees at any time of year and grow well in areas that have moist soil and plenty of sun.

A group of trees that really stand out during the winter are evergreens. Evergreens come in many shapes and sizes. They also provide shelter for birds and other wildlife in winter. Mugo pines and Yews are a great choice for smaller landscapes, with several dwarf varieties that stay under five feet. Balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) is a native fir that is common in northern and central Minnesota.

It's more shade tolerant than most evergreen trees and has glossy needles that shine in the snow. White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) is a great choice for larger landscapes, with soft feathery foliage that gracefully moves in the wind.

There are many unusual evergreens that can be planted in the landscape as well. The weeping white spruce (*Picea glauca* 'Pendula')

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is a unique variety of the white spruce (*Picea glauca*) that grows very tall and narrow, creating a stunning specimen. In recent years, breeders have created many dwarf varieties of Pine, Spruce and Fir that will stay compact and can be used in smaller landscapes, giving us endless opportunity for creativity in our client's landscapes. Evergreens are an excellent way to green up a landscape in winter.

Another way to add interest to a winter landscape are crabapples. Crabapples (*Malus species*) are primarily known for their beautiful spring flowers, but some varieties retain their showy fruit through the winter months. The varieties 'Donald Wyman' and 'Firebird' have beautiful red fruit that stay on the tree during winter. Most varieties of crabapple don't retain their fruit the entire winter, but they do provide nutritious food for birds in early winter.

### Shrubs

Most evergreen trees and shrubs in Minnesota are conifers, but there's a few evergreen shrubs that feature broad leaves. The most commonly grown broadleaf evergreen is the Boxwood (*Buxus*) and Rhododendron (*Rhododendron*). Boxwood are known for their green glossy foliage, and compact growth. These can be a great addition to your landscape. Rhododendron are grown for their large pink flowers in spring, and they retain their leaves in winter. Your clients may notice the leaves of their rhododendron curling during the winter, but don't need to be alarmed, because this is normal. This is a process known as thermonasty, which allows the plant to conserve moisture in the leaves during winter. Site selection is very important to maintain healthy Boxwoods and Rhododendron in Minnesota. They should be planted in locations that are sheltered from strong winds and winter sun to avoid winter burn. Winter burn is caused by the leaves drying out due to wind and sun exposure, resulting in dead foliage in spring. Rhododendrons require an acidic soil with a pH of under 6. A soil test is a useful method to determine where you can grow rhododendrons in a landscape.

Shrubs are a great way to help your client's landscape look beautiful during the coldest time of year. A favorite shrub of mine for winter interest is the American highbush cranberry (*Viburnum trilobum*). The highbush cranberry grows well in large spaces, and they feature clusters of red berries that persist during winter.

A well-known shrub for winter interest in Minnesota is the red twig dogwood (*Cornus sericea*). The red stems of dogwood really stand out in the snow, and if you're looking for more than just red stems, you also could plant dogwoods with yellow stems! The varieties 'Flaviramea' and 'Buds yellow' have gorgeous yellow stems that contrast nicely on their own or mixed with red stem varieties, such as 'Arctic Fire'. Remember to prune out the older stems on dogwood to encourage new stems, which provide the best color. The seed heads of Panicle Hydrangeas (*Hydrangea paniculata*) add a unique texture and enhance the winter landscape.

Photo courtesy of Harold Pellett



Above and below: *Betula nigra* 'Heritage'.

Photo courtesy of Harold Pellett





*Pinus strobus.*



Note the unique texture *hydrangea paniculata* seedheads add to this winter arrangement.



*Cornus sericea* 'Cardinal' with vibrant red stems.



*Cornus sericea* 'Flaviramea' features yellow stems.

“ INCORPORATING WINTER INTEREST KEEPS THE LANDSCAPE LOOKING FRESH AND ALLOWS YOUR CLIENTS TO APPRECIATE THEIR LANDSCAPE YEAR-ROUND. ”

### Perennials

The final group of plants we will look at are the perennials. Most perennials look good in summer then dieback for the winter, leaving little winter interest for our clients to enjoy. But there's a few perennials that shine during the darkest time of year. Ornamental grasses stand tall and provide beautiful texture and color during the winter. Some especially nice grasses include switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) and silver feather miscanthus (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'siberfeder'). Karl Foerster reed grass (*Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster') is another reliable performer for the winter landscape.

In addition to grasses, Black Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida*), Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) and sedum (*Sedum*) feature tall seed heads that stand up in the snow and provide an easy source of food for birds to enjoy.

Incorporating winter interest keeps the landscape looking fresh and allows your clients to appreciate their landscape year-round.



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