

# Add color, texture to WINTER LANDSCAPES with these suggestions

Winter in Wyoming can be overwhelming. It can be hard on people, plants, and it can feel like it lasts forever – it truly can because some parts of Wyoming have no frost-free days. Yikes!

As educators, we try to teach gardeners about making wise planting decisions to make the most of the growing season. We educate clientele about growing zones, protecting vegetation from various predators, and keeping plants watered – all to ensure healthy, beautiful plants in the spring, summer, and fall.

But what about beautiful plants in winter, or at least plants that catch our eye?

Here are some tips to help you build beautiful landscapes to enjoy in winter.

**Fruit:** Adding plants that bear and retain colorful fruit into winter is one way to build landscape excitement. Not only can fruit attract wildlife – which may be a blessing or a curse – they also add a pop of color. Let's take a look at a few tree and shrub species that retain fruit throughout the winter.

Crabapples are sought-after trees for landscapes because homeowners love their beautiful spring blooms. They tend to be relatively hardy in our Wyoming climate but can sometimes be challenged by diseases. When considering adding a crabapple to a landscape, specifically for its winter appeal, do some research. Different

varieties retain their fruit longer than others.

Mountain ash trees offer an orange-red winter fruit cluster that can add a display of color. Like the crabapple, the mountain ash also offers a spring blossom, but not as brilliant as the crabapple.

Cotoneasters are generally grown as shrubs and are often used in hedge plantings. They also bloom in the spring and hold their fruit into the winter. Cotoneaster can be grown unpruned, but many people use pruning to maintain a shape that is more to their tastes. Some people strive to find a balance between minimal pruning, which ensures attractive winter fruit, and more rigorous pruning, which produces landscape plants that “behave.”

**Texture:** Adding texture to a landscape can be a fun way to spruce-up the winter kitchen window view. Texture can be achieved with plant species (trees especially) having a variety of bark shape and color. Bark can add color with varying shades of red, white, brown, yellow, and even black, add physical texture with lines and bumps, and some light-colored bark can reflect more light on gray winter days.

Grasses can also be a great way to add texture. Not only do they rustle and wave in the wind, but they also dry in many different shades. There are numerous grasses with beautiful, textured seed heads that can add angles, round edges, and even physical softness to a landscape.

Crabapple



Mountain ash



In addition to the seed heads of grasses, many perennials can add interesting texture to a landscape.

Echinacea (coneflowers) and bunny tails (grass) are two very different plants, yet each offers something unique to a landscape. Bunny tails have a soft, cream-colored, bunny-tail-like head. Echinacea, on the other hand, tend to dry with lots of sharp edges while maintaining a spherical shape brown or maroon in color. Leaving perennials unpruned can add winter interest but also allows perennial stems to catch more snow for a winter/spring water source and insulation from harsh winter winds.

**Shape:** It's amazing how different-looking plants are with leafless stems. When selecting plants consider looking past the leaves and flowers to the stems. The stems may have lots of twist and turns, varying thicknesses, and even thorns, which can contribute to the aesthetics of a landscape. Winter frost and icicles

can further enhance the appeal and beauty of these species.

**Evergreens:** Traditionally, in Wyoming's climate, we tend to think about evergreens as needle bearing. Needle-bearing plants come in many shapes and sizes, which means there are many options for adding variety to your landscape: tall, short, wide, thin, ground cover ... the list goes on. But there can be frustrations with needle-bearing plants, especially where wind is a challenge. Like clockwork every spring, gardeners across the state ask county extension educators about their browning needle-bearing trees and bushes. This phenomena is due, in large part, to the drying effect of harsh wind. While wind doesn't always kill the plants, neither does it make them very aesthetically pleasing.

Luckily, evergreen doesn't have to mean needle bearing. There are also broadleaf evergreen options. Oregon grape holly is one of the more common in Wyoming. It comes in a lower ground-cover option or as

a more shrub-like growth pattern; however, it may not be an appropriate option for higher Wyoming elevations. *Kinnikinnick*, a Wyoming native with a fun name, is also a good broadleaf evergreen option.

A grower will find many plants fit more than one of these categories and may also find he/she appreciates attributes of plants that don't fit into one of these categories. Survival potential is perhaps the most important criteria in the plant selection process. After all, we want plants that can be enjoyed winter after winter.

For more information about trees and shrubs in Wyoming, check out the extension publication *Landscaping: Recommended Shrubs for Wyoming* and *Landscaping: Recommended Trees for Wyoming*. Both are available by going to [baryardsandbackyards.com](http://baryardsandbackyards.com), clicking on Treasure Trove of Information, then under Landscaping.

*We bet **Abby Perry**, a University of Wyoming Extension educator based in Carbon County, is experiencing some winter weather right now. The average low for Rawlins in December and January is 12 and an average high of 31. February's average low and high is 13 and 34, respectively. Perry also serves southeast Wyoming. She can be reached at (307) 328-2642 or at [ajacks12@uwyo.edu](mailto:ajacks12@uwyo.edu).*

