

# Plant Wise

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

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Prepared by Denise Fikes, Mills County Horticulture Assistant

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## Color in the Winter Landscape

By Richard Jauron  
Extension Horticulturist  
Iowa State University



In Iowa, the predominant colors of the home landscape in late fall and winter are white and various shades of gray and brown. An excellent way to brighten the drab winter landscape is to plant evergreens (pine, spruce, fir, etc.) and trees and shrubs that possess colorful fruit or bark.

### Colorful Fruit

While crabapples (*Malus spp.*) are usually planted for their flowers, many varieties also possess attractive, persistent fruit. Crabapple varieties with red fruit include 'Adirondack,' 'David,' 'Donald Wyman,' Red Jewel™, and Sugar Tyme®. 'Indian Magic' and 'Professor Sprenger' have reddish orange fruit, while Harvest Gold® and Golden Raindrops® are yellow-fruited crabapple varieties.

Hawthorns (*Crataegus spp.*) are another group of small, flowering trees that possess attractive fruit. Hawthorns produce white flowers in spring. In fall, its small (1/4 to 1/2 inch in diameter) fruit turn red and persist into winter. Two hawthorns noted for their excellent fruit displays are the Washington hawthorn (*Crataegus phaenopyrum*) and 'Winter King' hawthorn (*Crataegus viridis* 'Winter King').

The American cranberrybush viburnum (*Viburnum trilobum*) is an excellent shrub for screens, hedges and mixed shrub borders. The shrub grows eight to 12 feet tall and produces flat-topped clusters of white flowers in spring. Its fruit turn bright red in fall and persist into winter. 'Hahs' is a compact variety (grows approximately six to eight feet tall) that produces large, attractive fruit. 'Wentworth' grows 10 to 12 feet tall. Its fruit change from yellow-red to bright red in fall.

Most evergreen hollies are not reliably hardy in Iowa. However, several Meserve hybrid hollies (*Ilex x meserveae*) can be successfully grown in the state. 'Blue Prince,' 'Blue Princess,' 'Blue Boy,' 'Blue Girl,' China Boy® and China Girl® have dark, bluish green foliage and are hardy to -10 to -20 F (USDA Hardiness Zone 5). The female varieties produce attractive red fruit. (Hollies are dioecious. Dioecious plant species produce male and female flowers on separate plants. Only female plants produce fruit. However, a male plant is required for pollination and fruit set. Maximum fruit production can be obtained by planting several female plants and one or two males.)

The brightly colored fruit of many of the aforementioned trees and shrubs do not remain throughout the winter. Very cold temperatures in winter eventually cause many of the fruit to turn reddish brown or black. Hungry birds and squirrels may also devour the fruit. However, the fruit display in late fall and early winter can be spectacular.

### Attractive Bark

Selecting trees and shrubs with colorful bark is another way to add interest to the winter landscape.

A widely planted tree that possesses attractive, exfoliating bark is the river birch (*Betula nigra*). The exfoliating bark varies from salmon white to reddish brown. Often planted as a multi-stemmed specimen or "clump," the river birch may eventually reach a height of 40 to 50 feet.

Two small ornamental trees with exfoliating bark are the paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*) and Amur chokecherry (*Prunus maackii*). The paperbark maple grows 20 to 30 feet tall, possesses cinnamon to reddish brown exfoliating bark and is hardy in USDA Hardiness Zones 5 to 8. The bark characteristics of the Amur chokecherry are highly variable. Bark color varies from brownish yellow to cinnamon brown.

Some exhibit little or no bark exfoliation, while others exfoliate heavily. The Amur chokecherry grows 30 to 35 feet tall.

One of the most beautiful sights in winter is the bright red twigs of the redosier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) set against a backdrop of newly fallen snow. Native to Iowa, the redosier dogwood grows six to 10 feet tall. Several colorful varieties are available. 'Cardinal' has bright, cherry red stems. 'Alleman's Compact' is a compact (grows four to five feet tall), red-stemmed variety. 'Flaviramea' has yellow stems.

There are also several varieties of willow that possess colorful bark. The 'Flame' willow (*Salix* 'Flame') has reddish orange stems. The stems of the coral bark willow (*Salix alba* 'Britzensis') vary from yellow-orange to orange-red.

The redosier dogwood and willows should be pruned on a frequent basis as the young shoots possess the brightest colors. The 'Flame' and coral bark willows should be pruned annually. Cut plants back to near ground level in late winter. The redosier dogwood requires less pruning. In late winter, remove approximately one-third of the oldest stems near ground level.

When selecting trees and shrubs for the home landscape, we often choose plants that have attractive spring flowers or colorful fall foliage. However, don't forget to include some trees and shrubs that possess colorful fruit or bark in winter.

## What's a Gardener to do? (In the winter)

By Denise Fikes  
Horticulture Assistant  
Mills County Extension

Ah winter.....that time of respite for the gardener. No weeding, watering or deadheading to do. No worries about insects or fungus or all manner of leaf diseases. No digging, dividing, transplanting, or other various forms of manual labor. Nothing to do but sit and gaze out at the beautiful, snow-blanketed landscape. Nothing to do but sip a steaming mug of our favorite hot beverage, and stare wistfully out at the icicles dripping off the edge of the birdbath. It's such a peaceful, quiet, relaxing time of year for the gardener.....but wait! I can't do this all winter! Maybe through the month of January, and possibly into the first week of February, but winter is a long time here in the Midwest. I'm a gardener. I need to see green things growing and bright, beautiful blooms. I need to keep my hands busy, so all of my gardening muscles don't atrophy. What's a gardener to do???

Here are a few suggestions to help the gardener longing for days in the summer sun, to make it through the winter:

### **Plan Your Next Garden Adventure**

Settle yourself into a comfy chair with the aforementioned hot beverage, a few gardening catalogs, a few sheets of graph paper, a notebook, pencil & eraser, and any photos you have of last year's garden. Planning for your garden, whether it be vegetables, annual or perennial flowers, a water feature, or some type of structure, can save you time and money.

Take out your notebook and photos, think about your garden last year, and write down any ideas of things you want to change for this year; what plant didn't do very well? Which vegetables were more trouble than they were worth, or took up too much space in your garden? What flowers did you love and want to grow more of? Where would it be nice to have a small water feature or trellis for that vining plant you've always wanted to grow? You get the idea.

Use the catalogs to spark your imagination, inspire you to try a new plant, discover new color combinations that please you, and learn which plants should do well in your growing conditions. Pay close attention to USDA hardiness zones and light and moisture requirements when choosing plants to include in your garden plan. Do not plan to grow plants with differing needs next to each other.

Plant spacing is also very important for the health of a plant. This is where using graph paper comes in handy. Choose a scale to use such as one square of graph paper represents one square foot of garden space. Then if you know the dimensions of your planting beds, you can draw them out and fill them in with your desired plants including the exact number of plants you need. Many a chilly evening can be filled with planning and dreaming of your next garden adventure.

### **Extend the Growing Season**

There are several techniques that can be used to give you a head start on your gardening by as much as 2 - 4 weeks in the spring, and will allow you to continue growing for 2 - 4 weeks past the first frost in the fall. That's almost two extra months of growing! Here's a quick rundown of what you can do:

~Warm up the soil in early spring by covering it with a sheet of plastic mulch. Level the ground uniformly and then water it so that the ground is moist before laying the plastic mulch. Stretch it tightly over the soil surface, and then bury all edges. Clear plastic warms up the soil to higher temperatures than other types. It can be used early in the season to warm the soil, and then removed. Or you can punch holes in the plastic

to plant your seeds or seedlings. Be sure to check the soil moisture frequently and water through the planting holes.

~Row covers are put over growing plants to protect them from frost and cold temperatures. Various weights of garden fabrics are available. Row covers enhance plant growth by raising daytime temperatures around the plants, and then trapping the heat to provide insulation at night. Sometimes called “floating” row covers because they float on the plants as they grow, the material allows sunlight, water, and air to penetrate to the plants. They can also be used to protect crops from insects.

~Grow tunnels are similar to row covers except that the material is stretched over some type of support structure – as simple as wire hoops spaced over a single row or as involved as a metal greenhouse frame. The plastic or fabric is secured to the frame and the edges can be secured to the ground with pins or buried in soil. An enclosed grow tunnel (also called a hi-tunnel or hoop house) will protect young plants from damaging wind as well as keeping a warm environment for the new plants. These structures should be monitored closely for temperature fluctuations. On a sunny day, the plastic cover should be rolled up on the sides or opened a slit at the top to prevent overheating. Once all danger of frost has passed you can remove the grow tunnel. A plastic covered frame typically provides 3°F – 6°F of frost protection.

~Cold frames are sometimes called the poor man's greenhouse because they're simple to make from scrap lumber or hay bales covered with old window sashes. Basically a cold frame is a bottomless structure with a southward sloping, translucent lid. They're called “cold” because they have no internal heat source. They trap the heat from the sun to provide a place to grow cool season vegetables and flowers early in the season as well as later into the fall. Most cold frames offer some method of opening and closing the lid to provide ventilation and prevent “cooking” the plants on sunny days.

~Hot caps protect individual plants like a miniature greenhouse. They can be cone-shaped and made from paper or transparent waxed paper. The edges can be secured with rocks. Other items can be used for hot caps such as plastic milk jugs with the bottoms cut out. These provide excellent short-term frost protection for small, tender transplants in early spring. One product called “Wall O' Water” is a cone-shaped ring of connected plastic tubes filled with water that surrounds a single plant. The water inside the tubes will trap heat from sunlight during the day and release the heat slowly at night to protect the plants from freezing temperatures. The top can be spread open

for ventilation or gathered closed for greater heat retention.

### **Create Some Garden Art**

There is no better way to make your garden feel more personal and reflect who you are than by adding a few pieces of garden art you've either chosen or better yet, created yourself. Winter is an excellent time to browse the internet or bookstore for ideas for simple, fun projects you can do yourself. What? You're just not artistic? Well remember, this is for your garden. We're not talking Renoir at the Louvre here! A few ideas to get you started: concrete stepping stones, a mosaic tiled birdbath, a purchased plain wooden trellis, bench, or arbor painted by you to really stand out, a terra cotta pot given an aged copper finish. There really is no limit to the possibilities. One web site to check out is

[www.the-artistic-garden.com](http://www.the-artistic-garden.com).

### **Attend a Garden Show, Workshop, or Seminar**

See below for some upcoming opportunities!

I hope this helps a little to get you through the next couple of months. In this season of semi-dormancy, it's important to fertilize your brain cells and to plant a few seeds of thought ☺



## 2009 Siouxland GARDEN SHOW

Friday, March 20, 9 am – 8 pm  
Saturday, March 21, 9 am – 6 pm

Marina Center • 5<sup>th</sup> and B Streets • South Sioux City, NE

**Exhibitors, Speakers, Displays,  
Educational Sessions!**

Visit [WWW.extension.iastate.edu/woodbury](http://WWW.extension.iastate.edu/woodbury)  
for the schedule and latest information.

*Sure to get your gardening juices flowing!*

“The flowers of late winter and early spring occupy places in our hearts well out of proportion to their size.”

## Another Award Winning Year in the Garden

*Cinco de Mayo is one of the All American Rose selections this year.*



By Cindy Haynes  
Extension Horticulturist  
Iowa State University

As I sit in my cozy office and watch the students trudge through the snow, I ponder the upcoming gardening season. I am excited about the possible additions and changes to my landscape -- who wouldn't be dreaming of spring already?

This time of year brings a flurry of catalogs and magazines with pretty pictures of plants and announcements of award winners. While you might think that these "award winners" are ways people in the industry get together to sell more plants (this is true enough) -- the evaluations are generally rigorous. Only the best of the best can successfully "jump the hurdles" to become an award winner.

### Perennial Plant of the Year

One such award winning plant is Golden Hakone grass (*Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola'), the 2009 Perennial of the Year. Every year members of the Perennial Plant Association vote for a winning plant entry. Perennials that are nominated must be attractive, suitable for many areas across the country, low maintenance, pest and disease resistant, and readily available to the public. This year's winner is the latest in a long line of good perennials for the garden.

Other past winners you might recognize include: 'David' Phlox, 'Karl Foerster' Feather Reed grass, 'Goldsturm' Rudbeckia, Russian Sage, 'Becky' Shasta Daisy, 'Magnus' Purple Coneflower and 'Moonbeam' Coreopsis. Winning this award puts Hakone grass in good company and is guaranteed to garner attention from gardeners and landscape professionals.

Hakone grass has glowing, yellow-green leaves with a cascading effect and grows to about 18 inches tall and wide. It prefers partial shade and fertile, well-drained, moist soils. This grass is striking as a specimen or small grouping when combined with other shade-loving plants. The textural contrast of the narrow golden leaves next to a bold, golden-edged hosta makes for a stunning combination. Mass plantings are equally effective, in particular when used as an edging arrangement in the border.

Golden Hakone grass has few pest or disease problems and is not favored by deer. Matching this plant to suitable conditions, however, is a major consideration prior to planting. For best performance in Iowa, Golden Hakone grass should be located away from exposed sites with strong winter winds. It is considered hardy to zone 5 (central and southern Iowa), but some protection in winter increases chance of survival. Hakone grass also insists on a good, fertile, well-drained -- but moist -- soil. Sites with too little or too much water, such as a heavy clay soil, are quick ways to kill it.

### All American Selection Winners

Another of the plant evaluation processes is the All-American Selection Winners program (AAS). Every year several new annual flowers and vegetables are selected as winners. Flowers and vegetables are tested and judged on their performance across the country. Plants are promoted in a number of garden catalogs -- many times they are featured within the first couple of pages.

This year's winners bring variety to the vegetable garden. 'Honey Bear' squash is an acorn squash with a sweet flavor and compact plant habit. Unlike other acorn squash 'Honey Bear' is resistant to powdery mildew, so even the later-bearing fruit tend to ripen fully since the plants don't succumb to this disease. As with any acorn squash, 'Honey Bear' stores well and can be enjoyed months after harvesting.

'Lambkin' melon, another AAS winner, is a gourmet melon noted for its sweet, aromatic, juicy, white flesh. This oval shaped melon produces several two to four-pound fruits per plant. The thin yellow skin, early ripening and excellent keeping quality make it worth trying in the garden this year.

'Gretel' eggplant is another vegetable award winner from AAS. Gretel produces pure white, elongated fruits -- not the dark purple fruits like many eggplants. The compact plants can be grown in large containers and are noted for ripening early. The fruits also are more forgiving for harvest, remaining tender even as they mature beyond the typical three to four-inch fruit size.

### All American Rose Selection Winners

Several All American Rose Selection (AARS) Winners are named each year. This year, the quest for low maintenance, long-blooming roses brings us 'Carefree Spirit'. This rose is a relative of the popular 'Carefree Delight' rose, an AARS winner in 1996. Carefree Spirit is the first rose to endure the new "no fungicide spray" policy for AARS shrub roses and come out a winner! The cherry red, two-inch diameter blooms have a whitish eye and fade to pinkish red in the summer. The compact habit (five feet tall) and long blooming

characteristics are likely to continue the fondness consumers have for the Carefree series.

Words fail me in describing the coloring of Cinco de Mayo. This floribunda rose celebrates its place in the sun with large flower clusters that I can only describe as a blend of rusty-red and lavender-smoke. Its five-foot habit, fruity fragrance, glossy foliage and quickness in repeating blooms make it a great garden addition -- then you can attempt to describe the flower color to your friends.

Another rose winner is notable for its elegance and charitable purpose. Pink Promise is a hybrid tea rose selected by the National Breast Cancer Foundation to represent the continued compassion and promise for those affected by breast cancer. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this rose will be donated to the National Breast Cancer Foundation for education and early detection. Apart from the motivation to grow this rose to support a worthy cause, Pink Promise holds its own as a worthy garden plant as well. Plants are vigorous upright growers with excellent disease resistance and continually bloom during the growing season. The flowers are a blend of pinks with lighter outer petals and darker centers. And to top it off, the flowers also are highly fragrant. What more could you want?

All of the plants mentioned hold promise for stunning landscapes this year. Now you have to decide which (or how many) you want to add to your garden this spring. Good luck!

## Ask the ISU Extension Gardening Expert

### Which perennials are most likely to be heaved up out of the ground in winter?

Repeated freezing and thawing of the soil during the winter months can lift up or heave some perennials out of the soil. Heaving exposes the plant's crown and roots to cold, dry air. Perennials that have been heaved up out of the ground may be seriously damaged or destroyed.

Perennials most susceptible to heaving are shallow-rooted plants and those planted in late summer or early fall. Perennials prone to heaving include garden mum (*Chrysanthemum* spp.), Shasta daisy (*Leucanthemum* spp.), painted daisy (*Tanacetum* spp.) and coral bells (*Heuchera* spp.). Perennials planted in late summer/early fall are susceptible to heaving because they don't possess extensive root systems and are more easily pushed up out of the soil. Generally, most well established perennials

(those in the ground for one or more years) are not prone to heaving.

Heaving of perennials can often be avoided by planting in spring and mulching. Spring planting is especially important for garden mums, Shasta daisies and other perennials prone to heaving. Perennials planted in late summer/early fall should be mulched with several inches of straw or pine needles in late fall.

### Which type of pruning shears is best?

Hand pruners or pruning shears are generally used for cutting branches up to 3/4 inch in diameter. There are two basic types of hand pruners. Scissor-types have curved blades that overlap (scissor action) when making the cut. Anvil-type pruners have a sharpened upper blade which cuts against a flat surface (anvil). Each type is available in different sizes. Generally, scissor-type hand pruners are preferred over the anvil-types. Sharp, properly used scissor-type pruners make close, clean cuts. Anvil-types can't cut as close as scissor-types and are more likely to crush stems when pruning.



*Cinerarias, a cool-season greenhouse crop, are typically available from January through April.*

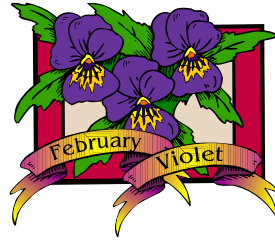
### How do you care for cinerarias?

Cinerarias, a cool-season greenhouse crop, are typically available from January through April. The daisy-like flowers, which are 1 to 4 inches in diameter, are available in a wide range of colors, including pink, red, lavender, purple and blue. Many have white eyes.

Cinerarias should be placed in bright, indirect light with a temperature near 60 degrees F. Keep the potting soil uniformly moist, but not saturated. If the potting soil becomes dry, the plant will wilt rapidly and may die if not promptly watered. Pots wrapped with decorative foil should have a hole punched in the bottom to allow for drainage. When watering plants in molded plastic pot covers, carefully remove the pot cover, water the plant in the sink, let it drain for a few minutes, then place the plant back in the molded pot cover.

Cinerarias should remain attractive for two or three weeks if given good care. After the flowers dry and shrivel, discard the plants.

# FEBRUARY GARDENING TO DO LIST



- February is one of the best months to prune woody plants. Fruit trees, shade trees, raspberries, grapevines, and many shrubs can be pruned successfully while they are dormant. Dormant pruning is easier too – since you can see the branch structure because there are no leaves!
- Late this month start seeds of broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage for planting outdoors in April. Some of the flowers to start then include geranium, petunia, snapdragon, pansy, impatiens, and salvia.
- Avoid damping off (a fungal disease) of seedlings by using sterile containers and seed starter mix. Infected plants suddenly collapse and rot at the soil line. Remove diseased seedlings as soon as they appear.
- Check the condition of overwintered geraniums. Geraniums that are stored bare root may need a brief soaking in warm water once or twice during the winter months.
- Browning of needles is an indication of desiccation injury. This is common on newly planted evergreens in windy and sunny sites. To prevent injury, water these newly planted evergreens lightly once or twice during the winter, especially on warmer days.
- Check for “frost heaving”. Frost heaving is caused by alternate freezing and thawing of the soil. This can lift plants out of the soil, exposing roots and crowns. Position plants back into the ground and mulch to moderate the changes in soil temperatures.
- Prepare or repair lawn and garden tools for the upcoming season.
- Continue checking trees for overwintering insects. Egg masses of tent caterpillars look like small, shiny blobs of mud on stems. Bagworms are found hanging on the branches of cedar, spruce and other evergreens. These should be pulled off and destroyed as they contain hundreds of eggs ready to hatch this spring.

## Master Gardener News

Plan to attend an upcoming Mills County  
ISU Master Gardener Seminar

Date: Monday, February 16 at 7:00pm

### Photography in the Garden

**Speaker :** Joanna Dragoun, owner  
My Mojo Photo

Everything you want to know about photographing flowers and landscapes using a digital or film camera. Attendees may bring their own camera.

Date: Monday, March 2 at 7:00pm

### Creating Edible Landscapes

**Speaker:** Dr. Eldon Everhart,  
Commercial Horticulturist

There are many plants including flowers, vegetables, herbs, vines, and fruits, that can be grown for both edible and ornamental value in your landscape. Come to learn about them in this entertaining and informative presentation by one of Iowa State University's Field Specialists.

**Place:** Glenwood Resource Center

**Cost to attend:** \$2.00

### Resources for Horticulture information

ISU's Hortline at (515) 294-3108

(Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-noon, 1-4:30 p.m)

ISU/Mills County Extension: 712-624-8616

[www.extension.iastate.edu/mills/yardgarden.htm](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/mills/yardgarden.htm)

### Iowa State University Publications

- PM 1814 Crabapples for Midwestern Landscapes (\$2.50)
- PM 1958 Pruning Ornamental Shrubs (\$1.50)
- SUL 0005 Pruning Trees: Shade, Flowering, & Conifer (Free)
- PM 874 Starting Garden Transplants at Home (\$.50)
- RG 401 Ornamental Grasses with Winter Interest
- RG 0105 Garden Tips: Guidelines to Seasonal Chores (Free)
- PM 0819 Planting a Home Vegetable Garden (\$.50)

