

HOME-GARDEN

Berry producing plants, conifers and such can add interest to your garden year-round

Grace Elton Special to the Telegram & Gazette

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Bringing cuttings into your home isn't just for the summer flower garden. With some planning, you can easily plant an interesting landscape that doubles as a source of cut greens and berries for your fall and winter table, too.

When choosing plants, think about landscape design first and material for cutting second. A combination of berry producing plants, conifers, deciduous shrubs and broad-leafed evergreens will add interest to your garden year-round. I like to think of these plants as the bones of your garden. When choosing them, think about texture and color. Aim for a range of greens, yellows, and variegated foliage, dense to airy branch structures, and a variety of berry colors. This will make your landscape design more interesting and provide more to work with when choosing which greens to cut.

When harvesting, always remember that you are pruning woody plants that are sometimes slow growing. Consider the proper shape of the plant and only harvest the minimal amount that you need to not leave the plant misshaped. You will have to live with a bad pruning job much longer than you will enjoy your cut greens.

For berries, winterberry hollies (*Ilex verticillata*) are at the top of my list. These hollies are deciduous and drop their leaves while hanging onto their colorful fruit. Cultivars come in red, such as Berry Heavy, yellow, such as Winter Gold, and orange, such as Little Goblin. Make sure that you harvest these early in the season before the turkeys and other birds get to the berries. Other hollies such as inkberry holly (*Ilex glabra*) and blue holly (*Ilex × meserveae*) are evergreen and have attractive foliage as well as berries. Earlier in the fall, beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) produces clusters of bright purple berries that also attract wildlife.

Conifers are a must for fall and winter arrangements. Many pines hold up well as cut greens, but for something more unusual, try a striped Himalayan pine (*Pinus wallichiana* 'Zebrina'). The false cypress genus (*Chamaecyparis*) includes conifers with a lot of variation in foliage color, density, and plant size. Korean fir (*Abies koreana*) has short dense needles that are dark green above and silver on the underside. For dusty blue foliage, try the blue spruce (*Picea pungens*). A favorite tree of mine, that is a bit more unusual is the Japanese umbrella pine (*Sciadopitys verticillata*). This plant is a living fossil with no close relatives, but it does have many cultivars. It has fleshy needles that hold up very well as cut greens.

Many deciduous shrubs, such as red or yellow twig dogwoods (*Cornus sericea*) have interesting stems that stand out in the winter landscape and offer a colorful addition to arrangements. Scarlet willow (*Salix × fragilis* f. *vitellina* 'Britzensis') has brilliant red to orange new growth. To maintain the red color, the shrub needs to be cut back heavily each year. Corkscrew willow (*Salix babylonica* f. *babylonica* 'Tortuosa') and corkscrew hazel (*Corylus avellana* 'Contorta') both have beautifully twisted branches.

In addition to the hollies, there are other broad leaf evergreens to consider. Mountain fetterbush (*Pieris floribunda*) has small, glossy, oval-shaped leaves. The flower buds form in the fall, so they can also be attractive in arrangements, but be sure to leave some to bloom in the spring. Their lily-of-the valley like flowers attract honeybees and bumble bees. Many of the smaller leafed rhododendrons, such as 'PJM' take on a mahogany-brown winter color and can make interesting additions to arrangements as well.

Finally, don't underestimate the beauty of seedpods and cones. One of my favorite cones is from hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*). They are tiny, about the size of a nickel, so they are a good scale for table arrangements. Common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), a member of the birch family, also has beautiful small cones and male catkins. Iris pods and ornamental grass plumes also offer different textures.

With so many options for a fall and winter cutting garden, the problem you will run into is not finding plant material but having room for these plants in your home garden!

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