

## Creating winter colour, whimsy in your garden



By Katharine Fletcher

Winter. It overcomes some of us, making us feel both cold and dreary.

Banish your doldrums! With planning, you can create a garden which adds colour, intriguing textures and shapes to the expanse of snow. And, with a bit of imagination, you can incorporate art that can endure winter's freeze-thaw conditions, too.

Tip: My cats eat birds. Consider how pets can jump onto art/plants to capture wildlife when placing your art or plants.

Fruit such as crabapples and highbush cranberries will add colour to your December through March garden.

At least, the fruit will last as long as the birds and squirrels do not eat them. And of course, offering food for wildlife is another great thing to do to enliven your winter.

### Varieties of crabapples

Crabapples come in many shapes, colours and sizes. Weeping crabs include Malus (Latin name for "apple") "Molten Lava" which bears yellow-orange fruit after white blossoms; "Red Jade" also has white flowers, but red fruit.

Spreading (not weeping) varieties include "Sargentii", bearing white flowers that change into red fruit; while "Red Jewel," which has white flowers with very bright red fruit, is supposed to be particularly excellent for keeping its fruit during winter.

Upright varieties include "Sentinel" with stunning white-to-pink flowers with red fruit.

For more varieties, go to: [www.treehelp.com](http://www.treehelp.com)

## **Fruit- and seed-bearing shrubs**

Shrubs are low woody perennials which, unlike most trees, have multiple stems (and yes, a trunk is a stem). Think of a lilac and you've got a good idea of a tall type of shrub. (For more information about shrubs such as the dogwoods, go to the Canadian Wildlife Federation [www.wildaboutgardening.org](http://www.wildaboutgardening.org) or Ottawa Field Naturalist Club site at [www.ofnc.ca](http://www.ofnc.ca). As well, visit the OFNC's Fletcher Wildlife Garden off Prince of Wales Drive (south of the Arboretum) to see species in winter.)

**Lilacs:** In early summer, lilacs reward us with heady-scented blossoms which attract pollinators such as hawk moths through to hummingbirds. Come winter, lilacs' dense mat of twigs and branches provides superb shelter for our winter bird residents. However, if you leave their seedpods on like I always do, you'll be able to observe birds dining on the seeds throughout winter.

**Red osier dogwood:** This native shrub's bark is brilliant scarlet red. Its dense branches and twigs ensure wildlife has shelter; its roots stabilize the soil. Tip: take a basket-making course and make a red basket or wreath you can use – and leave outside in winter as art, or tuck bird-food into them and watch birds seek shelter and eat.

**Common (or Canadian) Elderberry:** A native whose pretty white flowers (which are edible) turn to dense clusters of tiny purple-black berries in autumn. These are used for wine, juices, jellies and soups but leave them be if you'd like to see black berries feed birds come winter!

## **Other ornamentals**

Many plants are pretty during winter. Do you have a pond? If so, Cattails are picturesque. Their metre-and-a-half grass-like leaves and chubby, velvet-brown seedpods rustle in the breezes, too, which adds an additional sensory delight to your garden.

Be creative: when you are walking in the city, check what is growing where and never be afraid to ask what a plant is, if you see the homeowner. Most of us gardeners like to offer helpful advice.

Whether you opt to plant a tree or shrub in your garden, enjoy rethinking how winter will look, next year, from your kitchen window.

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