Breathe some life into your winter landscape

By Laura Murphy

Many of us who live in Lake Havasu City in the winter months only live here part time. Refuge is taken here as an escape from the cold and snow. Our winter months are perfect for patio living and enjoying the cool sunny days. Many of our landscapes though can be as bare and uninteresting during the winter months as those left behind under a blanket of snow.

Lots of our wonderful landscape plants that do well here during the summer months are deciduous or dormant in the winter. For example Red Bird of Paradise is an outstanding summer blooming shrub that spends its winter as a mound of twigs and half dead leaves. Texas Rangers are another outstanding shrub that many people have planted in their yards. In winter, their foliage gets very thin and twiggy. The result is a landscape that is dull and uninviting during the time you are here to enjoy it. With a little care and proper selection though, your winter home can be full of interest and color.

To start with, look around your yard now. Are there bare spots where winter dormant or deciduous plants reside? Decide if you want to replace these or camouflage them. I am a year round resident so there are many plants I want to keep for their summer beauty, even though they do not look good in the winter months. I can hide them by planting a plant with winter interest in front of or next to them. In the winter my eye will be drawn to the interesting plant and will less notice the dormant one. When summer comes, the summer beauty will stand out and become the eye catcher. If you are not here during the summer months, you may wish to replace the dormant plants with something that will give you more enjoyment.

How about color in your yard. Do you have winter blooming plants that provide color? Good choices for drought tolerant shrubs are Emu Bush,
Feather Leaf Cassia, Chuparosa or Baja Fairy Duster. There are several winter blooming trees that can add color such as Sweet Acacia, Mulga, Texas Mountain Laurel and Cascalote.

Color does not have to come from flowers. Some plants such as the Purple Hop Bush have deep bronzy purple leaves that can really add some winter interest. Evergreen plants can also provide color in shades of greens and grays. Cactus such as the Santa Rita Prickly Pear or a Yellow Barrel can add color even when not in bloom. And let’s not forget how wonderful a citrus tree can look (and taste) with the dark green foliage and colorful fruit hanging down.

How interesting is your winter landscape? Contrast of either color or texture can add to visual interest. For example, plant gray leaved plants next to dark green ones for contrast in color. Both the gray and the green stand out better. Contrast in texture can be shown off by
planting spiky agaves or strappy red yucca next to the rounded leaves of Texas mountain laurel or the open ball of a creosote bush.

If after surveying your landscape you find it needs some winter pizzazz, start by looking at your neighbor’s yards. What looks good right now? Identify what the plants are and start to incorporate them into your landscape. Keep in mind though that if you are not here during the summer months, the plants better be pretty well adapted to make it through the heat of summer with minimal care.

In winter, hardscape items such as walls, boulders, fountains or gazebos and the like can add to the visual interest. For an added punch some of these items can be painted bright colors. Patio furniture can contribute to the color scheme with brightly colored cushions and umbrellas. Yard art can add color and whimsy to both the front and back yard landscapes.
Don’t let a dull winter landscape bring you down. It is not that hard to breathe life back into it. With a little planning and some creative juices, your winter landscape here can be full of vibrant color and interest.

* * * Citrus Workshop * * *

The Lake Havasu City Master Gardeners are hosting a free Citrus Workshop on March 17th at 9:30 am at the Library. This extremely popular workshop will teach you how to get started with citrus and how to maintain your existing trees. If you want good fruit, you need to water and fertilize properly. Your Lake Havasu backyard can produce some of the best citrus you have ever had. This workshop can help you achieve that.

Laura Murphy is a Lake Havasu City Master Gardener. For more information, contact the Lake Havasu City Master Gardeners by calling their Hot Line at 505-4105 or visit us at Home Garden Day from 11 am to 1 pm the first Tuesday of every month at the Library.

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