

## Winter Planning & Holiday Decorating

By Dawn Donovan, November, 2008

The holiday season is upon us once again. Soon our days will be filled with family gatherings, seasonal parties, and company filling our homes. This is the perfect time to spruce up your existing landscape to treat holiday guests and begin planning for spring landscape enhancements.

As with any project you start, it is best to approach your landscape makeover with a well-thought-out plan. To get the most out of your landscape and minimize the cost as well as the work, it is critical to have a proper plan. You will first need to measure your lot and scale it on paper. (Some may have a plot plan of their home already; they can make a copy and sketch their ideas on it. Others may need to use graph paper and manually plot their lot by measuring each side of the yard and plotting out the dimensions of the lot to scale on paper.) You may also be able to look up satellite imagery of your home on city and county websites and on Google Earth. These will provide scaled views of your home from an aerial view. Or if you're not inclined to do this yourself, contact a professional designer or landscape architect to draw up the design for you.

Now that you have your lot defined you can start designating areas in your landscape you want to remodel, enhance, or demolish. Consider the exposure of each area defined on your drawing and choose plants accordingly. This will provide you with a good list of plants to research and ultimately add to your landscape.

Once you have chosen plants, pencil them in on your plan. Think about how you will be able to access the areas you've chosen for the plants -- it may be difficult to move an 8 foot evergreen tree through an existing landscape without damaging it or other plants. So consider your obstacles as you design the plant palette for each area.

Now is a good time to take advantage of tree and shrub specials at your local garden center to decorate for the holidays. With your landscape plan in place, you can start by using evergreen trees or shrubs as seasonal decorations prior to planting them in your yard. These beautiful trees and shrubs will add year round color and holiday spirit to the landscape. The blue and green hues of the plants sparkle in the winter snows and glow when emphasized with landscape lighting. Plant trees and shrubs directly into frost resistant decorative pots or leave them in their original container and use the frost resistant containers as cache pots. Consider flanking your front door with small lighted Christmas trees, such as Alberta spruce and green Colorado spruce, or place one or more on your patio where you can enjoy it from inside. Just be sure to keep them watered.

(If your goal is to plant these in the ground after the holidays, plan ahead and dig the hole, according the planting instructions that come with your plants, now before the ground freezes. Fill hole with straw or burlap and cover it with plywood so no one falls in. Keep soil and amendments in garage or shed so that they do not freeze. It is extremely important to water your tree the appropriate amount once it is in the ground. This will vary according to the amount of precipitation and temperature.)

Or if you'd rather have something more unusual, consider winter floral arrangements. Black clay, frost resistant pots and cast iron urns make stunning winter containers that will dress up your entry throughout the winter. Use spruce tips, pine boughs, holiday greens and berries along with redtwig dogwood stems and other natural materials from your yard or local garden center to create a lush arrangement that requires no watering. You can also use ornaments and spray paint the sticks for more drama. Add holiday lights to brighten up the containers and add a hint of color to your holiday arrangements. For more container ideas and inspiration, visit your local garden center.

Early preparation in your landscape can make for an easy transition from winter to spring. The groundwork done now will allow you to use your new plant material in a versatile manner in your landscape. Your savings on sale priced plants will create more opportunities to landscape within your budget. With these savings you'll be able to splurge on spring flowering shrubs, perennials and annuals to add those finishing touches to your yard.