

Beautiful lawn and gardens into the fall and winter

Homeowners love when spring and summer finally roll around and they get the opportunity to spend time outdoors, reap the benefits of all of their hard work in the garden and finally see some splashes of color and interest after the harsh days of winter. Many places are lucky enough to have beautiful weather late into the fall and even the winter. In many areas of the country, it is not unusual to have family gatherings with everyone crowded around a fire pit, or outdoor fireplace taking in the crisp fall air and enjoying a cool, clear night. But, by this time of the year most homeowners have already given up on their lawns and backyards. The heat of the summer shriveled all their flowers in the hanging baskets and the flowerpots. It basically seems crazy to spend money on replacing them with fall and winter quickly approaching. So, homeowners are now looking for ways to add year-round visual interest to their backyards and landscaping. And, even when winter turns snowy and the darker days are spent indoors, there are countless ways to keep your garden alive all throughout the dead winter months.



In reality, most homeowners spend more time at home in the fall and winter and often have even more time to survey their surroundings. When they do, they feel disappointed in what they see. Gone are the spring and summer days where their grass looks emerald green in color and all of the perennials and annuals are blooming beyond belief. What is a homeowner to do? Is there any way to make a garden and yard look appealing throughout the fall and winter? In fact, there really are ways to do just that. Against the blank canvas of winter, a homeowner has the opportunity to select some focal points whether they are trees, landscaping or other elements and make them shine more than they can when all the foliage is filled in during the spring and summer months.

If you spend the majority of your winter days in the kitchen or living area of your home, then simply take a moment and take in the view of your yard from these windows. You'd be surprised how adding a couple of zone-appropriate trees or shrubs could change the landscape.



Plan #820-09TS-0001
An outdoor fireplace like the one shown above will keep family and friends lingering outdoors all throughout the fall and winter.



Plan #820-011S-0015

Here are some terrific ways to keep your fall and winter yard and gardens looking as good as they do in the spring and summer.

Lawn Care

If you love the look of a thick, full lawn even in the cold winter months, then plant rye grass, bluegrass and other types of northern grasses that will endure even in the colder months of the year.

Ornamental Grasses

There are many types of ornamental grasses that add a splash of color to a winter garden. A couple of varieties include *Indiangrass*, *Gulf Muhly* and *Little Bluestem*. These are easy to grow and do not require much fertilization. Their thin and feather-like plumes accent a landscape all throughout the year, but their neutral brown, yellow and beige colors stand out against a stark winter landscape especially well.

Plants and Flowers

Euryops Pectinatus is a bright yellow flowering evergreen shrub that will bloom all 12 months and often right through the winter. Plant it in a warm, sunny spot and give it three to four feet to grow.

Other flowers that have become favorites in the winter include: *Crocus*, *Snowdrops*, *Witch Hazel*, *Christmas Roses*, *Winter Jasmine*, *Manzanita*, *Poinsettias* and *Pansies* that typically bloom throughout the fall and winter. *Icicle Pansies* are also a good pick.

Scaevola is a beautiful ground cover choice. Its small, yet rich leaves display purple flowers January through November. *Hollies* also come in many varieties as well as ground cover and are always a top choice with their rich green foliage and bright red berries.

Shrubs and Trees

With less vegetation and foliage all around, the color and texture of a tree's bark becomes more predominant. Unique textures and tree shape can finally take center stage without all the foliage getting in the way. Some great choices for interesting bark include: *Paperbark Maple*, *Eastern Redbud*, *Serviceberry* and *Redtwig Dogwood*. Select from dozens of woody shrubs and trees that are filled with colorful stems or berries like *Winterberry* or *Sparkleberry*. *Winter King Hawthorn* is another choice that is underused in landscape and features bright red to orange-red berries well into the winter and often until February.

Cercis Occidentalis, or *Western Redbud* is another small tree that adds interest to the yard all year. In the spring, it is covered in flowers, the summer offers bright blue-green foliage and in the fall the tree turns light yellow or red. When the branches are bare in the winter, they reveal a beautiful pattern that can be especially eye-catching at night.

Also, *Pyracantha*, or *Firethorn* is an attractive evergreen shrub that grows very tall and produces colorful orange berries. It also has large thorns allowing it to act as a natural security fence.

Hardscaping and Accessories

Maybe you want to design your outdoor winter landscape using more than the basics of plants and shrubs and really create a year-round area for your family.

Some other great additions to a winter backyard garden include stunning garden sculptures, arbors, gazebos, benches, stone walls, crack-resistant planters and lighting. These elements finally get to shine in winter when all the splashes of color from flowers are often long gone.



Plan #820-011S-0018

A covered porch like the one shown above offers year-round outdoor enjoyment for relaxing and grilling.



Plan #820-055D-0215

Colorful Additions

Most of the time summer flowers take the focus over the planter they dwell in, but in the winter, try boosting your yard's color quotient by investing in some colorful planters and place them within sight of your interior spaces. Even filling them with small pine or evergreen trees seems fun and playful if the planter is a bright, unexpected color.

Or take that chipped Adirondack chair that looks a little worn from the past summer and repaint it a bright, playful color that will stand the cold and dull of winter by adding that burst of color on your patio or in your garden. This fun accessory will be a great reminder of warm days to come while adding personality all winter to your backyard.

Another great option for kicking your winter garden up a notch is a portable spa. Tranquility and relaxation make a portable spa very enticing, but it can be incorporated into a multi-level deck that is covered or partially covered for year-round enjoyment. Ever enjoyed the warmth of a spa while snow flurries fall all around? This experience will take your senses in the garden to an entirely new level!

Another very popular choice in outdoor living spaces right now is the addition of an outdoor fireplace or firepit to warm those chilly nights of fall and winter. Whether you purchase something from a local home improvement

retailer, or hire a landscape contractor, it is great to huddle around a warm outdoor fire on a cold winter's evening with your favorite cup of cocoa.

Before you give up on the idea that your winter garden can rival the beauty of your garden in the spring and summer, try some or all of these great ideas for adding color, focal points and style. You may be surprised at how your garden takes on a whole new personality in the winter highlighting new plants, trees, textures and colors in a way you never believed was possible.



Plan #820-071S-0001

“Right” sizing your home



When you call out to another family member does your home seem to echo? Are there more spaces that aren't used in your home than are being used? Like many Americans who once thought, “bigger is better,” you may be changing your tune. Many of us are changing our ways and learning that downsizing is the way to go. And, thanks to the recent recession, we have learned that it is possible to have simplicity in our lives, spend less money and still enjoy a very full life.

Once considered standard practice for empty nesters and retirees only, downsizing is now reaching all ages and incomes and it is for a variety of reasons. Many have chosen to downsize their home because they want a simpler lifestyle with less maintenance. People who love to travel or, who are involved with many hobbies outside their home want less clutter and maintenance in their everyday life. Downsizing has also come to the forefront of society because of those who have faced financial difficulties in the past several years. Many homeowners have had no choice but

to downsize and rid themselves of expensive mortgages in order to make ends meet. Whatever the situation, there are several advantages to downsizing that may convince you that it is the right choice for you and your family.

Advantages to Downsizing

Increased Cash Flow

Whether you shrink your mortgage or you use the proceeds of selling your current home to pay entirely for a new home, you will end up with more money in your pocket for saving or spending in another way. Cutting your house costs is an instant way to increase your savings. So, whether you retire in 5 years or you're just starting out, think about the added security a smaller home will bring to your future.

More Time

Less rooms and smaller ones will cut the time it takes to keep your home maintained more than you think. Use all this free time for something you really enjoy.

Lower Utility Bills

Yes, this goes along with increased cash flow, but typically smaller homes don't have as much wasted space, so you will

be living more efficiently. Using less energy while keeping your home comfortable means lower utility bills.

Reduced Consumption of Everything

From electric and gas to furniture and home accessories, if there is no place to put it, you will think twice before buying it. That means you will automatically spend less on food, clothing and consumer goods probably without really noticing.

Less Stress

A smaller home means less responsibility with chores, hefty maintenance bills and other monthly obligations as a homeowner. Those who successfully downsize appear happier when they are no longer overwhelmed by the high demand of a larger home.