



MISSION: BEAUTIFICATION ... CONSERVATION ... EDUCATION

Planting and Nurturing

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Landscape Design: Suzanne Finger, Editor

Environmental Edition: May, August, November, February – Mary Lovings, Editor

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A Few Design Tips to Make the Most of Fall in the Garden

The little sprinkle of magic over the months of October and November in the Deep South is something I look forward to each year. I dare not call it Fall because it would then be associated with the cooler season that is supposed to occur between the September equinox (mid to late September) and the winter solstice (mid to late December). As you know, September in our neck of the woods can be one of the hottest months of the year. I struggle to come to terms with Wal-Mart's proud display of mums and pumpkin-pie-spice *everything* when temperatures are still soaring near 100 degrees. As I write this, there is the much welcome pitter patter of rain outside ending this frightfully dry October, with the earth as crunchy as a piece of toast. With the promise of some cooler weather on the way I hope to inspire you with a few landscape design tips for making the most of fall in our beautiful southern environment.

Near the end of summer, one might find me standing over an air-conditioning vent, looking out my window with the longing to go out (without having a heat stroke) and pick up the pieces the long hot summer has left behind. Fall is the perfect season to clean up and work on the "bones" or structure of our landscapes. It is also the perfect time to install new plantings so that they will be allowed to get established before the heat of the next summer, not to mention having fun with simply putting out some colorful mums and a pumpkin or two. You can **pull** out, **prune** back, **put** out **pine** straw, and **place** **pumpkins** on the **porch** all the while sipping on a **pumpkin-spice latte**! In all seriousness, there are three major factors that contribute to the fall and winter landscape that I would like to consider in this edition.

Garden “Bones”

The first element I would like to explore is the importance of the garden structure, or what I like to refer to as the “bones” of the garden. This is the base layer of plant material (usually evergreen) that primarily defines the spaces of the landscape all year round. When considering the structure of the garden, it can be helpful to compare landscape design to interior design. We are more comfortable in a space with boundaries or defined edges. When we apply that principle to the landscape, that means we create walls to divide outside spaces into separate rooms by using plants or other structures such as fences. The spaces created can be large lawn areas or small intimate spaces, and the walls can range from formal, trimmed hedges to natural, layered groupings.



The photo on the right was taken in late October. It demonstrates how a garden with formal evergreen plantings provides for year-round beauty because of the strong definition of space and clear lines created by the boxwood hedges and tree-form ligustrum.

During the fall and winter months, the structure of the garden becomes more apparent as our deciduous trees go bare and blooms are at a minimum. This is when the correct grouping and placement of these evergreen elements becomes so important. Textures and varying colors of these trees and shrubs become the star of the show during this time of year, so it is important to remember to include a variety when selecting the plant material for your garden bones. Larger groupings of the same plant create more visual interest than many different types of plants scattered across the landscape. A plant here and a plant there can be visually distracting, where larger groupings help to create strong lines which are key to having a visually pleasing landscape. Formal hedges are always a winner in the winter landscape to create that strong line for the eye to follow. Simply redefining the edges of planting beds with a fresh layer of pine straw or other type of mulch can also give the eye a strong line to follow and provide contrast from the lawn that is going dormant. This alone gives the landscape a freshening-up and helps distract from any serious grooming or pruning of plants that may have been done during the cooler months.

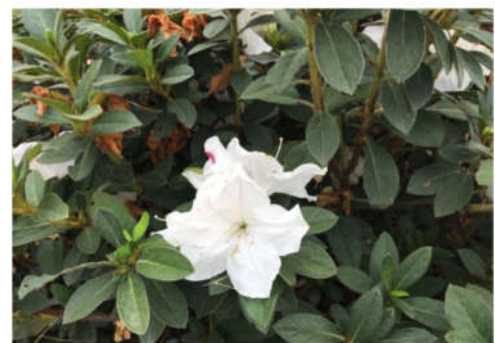


The photo above is an example of a soft layered planting that creates a living wall. The plantings define the open lawn space and provide a screen to the adjoining property. It is also an example of how variations of color and texture can add interest to the landscape year-round.

Fall Performers



Above: *Crape Myrtle Fall Color*



Left: *'Autumn Lily' Encore Azalea*

The second element is the incorporation of plant material that can provide interest during the fall or winter months. Our piedmont friends certainly have more to choose from for fall color in the deciduous trees. However, it is important for those of us in the Coastal Plain to remember that we too have a few performers, and the correct placement of these trees or shrubs can help to showcase the fall color. For instance, a 'Natchez' crape myrtle can have a beautiful fall show and if placed in front of an evergreen hedge, it can be a showstopper. Other trees to consider are hickories, white oaks, black gum and definitely ginkgos.

Our sasanqua camellias with their glossy evergreen leaves, are not only excellent plants for fall interest, but can also serve well as bones in the garden. They make beautiful hedges as well as small patio trees when pruned into tree form. The fall blooms are icing on the cake and even though they usually are not super showy from afar, they are lovely to enjoy when observing them at a closer range. The encore azaleas are another fall favorite, producing their largest bloom during the fall. I have found that larger groupings of these make the best impact in the landscape. 'Autumn Lily,' a white bloomer on dark green leaves is a particular favorite of mine. Our native pink muhly grass is another fun addition to the landscape with its pink fluffy tips blowing in the breeze this time of year. As with any plant placed into the garden for seasonal interest, it is important to remember to incorporate enough of the plant, in large enough groupings, to make a visual impact, or have it in just the right spot for an accent plant.



Left: *Muhly Grass (muhlenbergia capillaris)* in fall color.

Right: *'Shi Shi Gashira' Camellia (Camelia sasanqua 'Shi Shi Gashira')* planted as a specimen in a planting bed. Warm pink blooms provide a pop of color in the fall.

Mum's the Word!



Lastly, fall comes with the opportunity to take advantage of annuals, potted plants, and even pumpkins to provide concentrated color where it counts the most. Bright, cheerful mums are great ways to incorporate a shock of color at your front door or in containers on a patio. Keep them moist but not too wet, and pinch off spent blossoms to keep them flowering longer. They love the sun, but make sure you don't let them dry out. If they do, poke holes into the soil with a pencil before you water to make sure the water travels through the soil. If you are going to try

to keep them alive for the following year, then you need to repot them in a little larger pot. However, if you are like me and you are lucky to keep them alive until the trick-or-treaters come, then you might want to try this little trick I have discovered. They seem to put on the best show of flowers when I keep them in their pot. Even when I put them in the annual beds on either side of my front door, I just poke the pot down in the soil far enough to not be seen! This makes for easy clean up when I send them to the compost pile and get the beds ready for pansies.

In the case of cool season annuals, such as pansies, be sure to use a color that complements your home. Locate the annual bed or containers so as to bring attention to your front door for a welcoming effect. Remember that even though the multi-color pansy displays at the garden center are lovely, the use of all one color makes the most visual impact in your garden. So now you can pull those garden gloves on, and step out into the cooler air, ready to make the most of fall in your garden!

All photos by Suzanne Finger