



Alamosa Landscapes

Winter Arranges From A Sleeping Garden

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First, a note about tree preservatives: A friend recently told me a story about a Christmas tree years ago. They left it up so long it had no needles by the time they took it down. Who wants that to happen? If you leave your tree up for a long time or end up with a fairly dry one, you might consider making your own preservative. A preservative contains “a food source for the plant, an acidifier (making hard water more acidic which helps the plant take in water and food), and a disinfectant to prevent mold, fungi, and algae from growing,” according to thoughtco.com. Mix all ingredients together.

Basic recipe: 1 gallon water, 2 cups light corn syrup, 4 t. chlorine bleach, and 4 t. lemon juice or vinegar.

Alternatives: Substitute 4 t. sugar dissolved in the water for the corn syrup. Substitute a can of acidic soft drink such as Sprite or 7-Up for the corn syrup and lemon juice. Some folks think adding a penny to the solution helps act as a fungicide due to the copper.

I make an evergreen wreath each winter holiday season, but started wondering about other winter arrangements that could use items from our garden – even here is cold, brown Alamosa! Turns out I have several options for ingredients. I am fortunate to have several juniper shrubs, Austrian pines, and mugo pines to provide green boughs. While I don't have red berries exactly, I do have small, red crabapples (*Malus*) that are still on the tree and red rose hips from wild pink rose bushes (*Rosa woodsia*). I also have dark purple berries from Peking cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster acutifolia*). Apparently, burning bushes (*Euonymus alatus*) can produce red berries, but either mine haven't or the birds had first choice.

Several folks suggest using bare branches such as white stems from aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) or birch (*Betula*) and red twigs from red dogwood shrubs (*Cornus stolonifera*). I love the red dogwood twigs, but my shrubs need every branch they produce so I will enjoy them au natural! Other people like oddly shaped branches and twigs.

I love evergreen cones and have plenty of Austrian and mugo pine cones. I also glean ponderosa (*Pinus ponderosa*) and spruce (*Picea pungens*) cones on my walks around Alamosa picking them up from sidewalks and gutters – I don't walk on people's property!

Much of the remaining options are colored beige to brown but having interesting shapes and/or texture. Seed heads from flowers such as gloriosa daisies (*Rudbeckia hirta* - I pull off any leftover petals and keep the dark center), hydrangeas (*Hydrangea arborescens*), and hops (*Humulus*) add a nice touch. I

purchased some tall golden rod plants last summer and one has a lovely large dried head. Sea lavender, sea holly, German statice (*Goniolimon tataricum*), and globe thistle (*Echinops*) are purplish when in bloom but dry to almost white. Sea lavender ends up looking a bit like baby's breath and the sea holly and globe thistles have spiky heads.

I like color so will add some bright ribbon bows much like those I use on wreaths. You also might consider adding solar lights. Many are globes on sticks that are attractive during the day and glow beautifully during the long nights.

I plan to place my arrangements outdoors and don't plan to water them so I'm not worried about containers freezing. I will lay arrangement material on top of the soil I have in whiskey barrels that contain annual flowers in the summer. Also, I have a couple of large tall urns that will work well outside in the winter. If you don't have a lot of material or you are very particular as to the shape of your arrangement, you could put Styrofoam in the container and poke material into it. Or you could use chicken wire across the top and poke pieces through.

If you want your arrangement inside, I'd be very careful which seed heads I included. Once, I used German statice and unbeknownst to me, little spiky bits fell off and found their way into our bare feet. Ouch!

Wander you garden and you might be surprised what you can use during the sleepy time of the year!

"Nature has many scenes to exhibit, and constantly draws a curtain over this part or that. She is constantly repainting the landscape and all surfaces, dressing up some scene for our entertainment. Lately we had a leafy wilderness; now bare twigs begin to prevail, and soon she will surprise us with a mantle of snow. Some green she thinks so good for our eyes that, like blue, she never banishes it entirely from our eyes, but has created evergreens." Henry David Thoreau, Nov. 8, 1858