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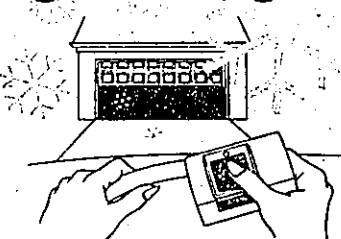
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GARDEN SPOT

Plan ahead for those winter windowboxes



MARTY FIGLEY

At this time of the year, windowboxes can look pretty bleak and most of us fill in the bare spaces with evergreen branches, a big Christmas bow and other trappings of the season. Alas! many of these once beautiful displays are left in the boxes too long and become eyesores after they have served their purpose.

In our cold Michigan winters there is not much hope at all for colorful windowboxes, but some innovative ideas come to mind when you again plan your planting scheme that you may wish to try.

If you are growing English ivy, *Hedera helix* in a windowbox, you have a start on an interesting display for the whole season; as it is evergreen and adds a graceful feel to the picture. If not, you might plant "Baltica," which stays dark green in winter, but is a vigorous grower or "Glacier" with foliage that turns pinkish in winter. Another variety "Needlepoint" grows slowly and has small leaves with pointed lobes. If the top does die back in the winter, the plant will probably come back from the roots.

A large windowbox will hold Japanese holly, *Ilex crenata*, which usually grows less than four feet tall. The varieties "Convexa," "Glory," and "Northern Beauty" are undamaged by winter cold.

Common periwinkle, *vinca minor*, stays evergreen, and winter sun and cold can color the foliage a purplish-bronze. In a windowbox it will need to be cut back and pruned as needed. If it is cut back to a node, it will become bushy rather than "straggly." Lavender blue flowers are the norm, but varieties with pale blue, darker purple, pink and white forms are available, which appear in the spring. Good for sun or shade, sunny locations produce more flowers.

Two species of wild ginger, *Asarum*, also stay green in the winter. They are *A. europaeum* and *A. caudatum*. Most ginger species produce some plants with foliage which has silver, white, or gray markings in various patterns, which will add interest all season long.

You might want to try wintergreen, *Gaultheria procumbens* with white bell-like flowers which turn into bright, orange-red berries in the fall and reaches a height of eight inches. These plants like forest-like conditions, lots of moist compost rich soil on the acid side and are slow spreading.

Another thought is to use shrubs such as dwarf conifers and evergreen shrubs. Box, *Buxus sempervirens* can be easily trained into geometric shapes. Another choice might be *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*, which includes many cultivars. The foliage of "Green Globe" (to one foot) is bright green, while "Minima Aurea" (about two feet) has dense gold foliage.

Juniperus communis is another candidate. "Compressa" is good as is *J. squamata* "Blue Star," (16 inches) a bushy plant with steely blue foliage. Two dwarf mountain pine, *Pinus mugo*, varieties have rounded shapes, "Humpty" has short needles and "Ophir" turns bright gold in the winter. Both grow to about 16 inches in height.

One *Santolina*, which reaches a height of about one foot and has silvery foliage, is *S. chamaecyparissus nana*, is small enough for a windowbox. If the summer flowers are trimmed off, the plant will stay more compact.

Three local specialty nurseries which carry dwarf plants are Arrowhead Alpines in Fowlerville, (517-223-3581), open April through October; Saguro Rare Plant Nursery, Whitmore Lake, (313-449-4237, open March through November; and Alexander and Associates, Mt. Clemens (313-296-1500), which carries

See FIGLEY, 16D

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