

Winter garden features variety

BY MARGE ALPERN
Staff Writer

We gardeners visualize our plantings as we expect them to look in their prime. Tulips, lilacs, roses or annuals are pictured in full bloom. During the rest of their cycle we'd just as soon forget about them.

But their time of peak perfection is brief, and here in Michigan our surroundings are devoid not just of colorful flowers but of all green growth for many months of the year.

During the leafless months, evergreens gain enormously in importance as focal points and serve to connect us to the world of nature that we love. As I look out the frosty windows, my eye is drawn to the evergreens I've chosen through the years and for the most part I'm pleased.

Two chamaecyparis have held places of honor for many years in different sections of my yard. These evergreens have contributed grace and color with their flattened, bright green spray-like branches. One has a round shape and the other is pyramidal, but both have a bononi-like appearance as I have carefully pruned them to achieve a distinctive shape.

As small specimens of full and bushy habit, chamaecyparis are hardy, disease-free and very satisfying to watch grow. Each of mine is planted close to an enormous deciduous tree, which makes a stunning background and interesting contrast in material, and the small chamaecyparis seems to be almost cuddling up to them for protection.

There are many forms of chamaecyparis, sometimes called false cypress, and I'm not sure which varieties I have. In addition to tree and shrub forms there are beautiful dwarf varieties. Connoisseurs of dwarf evergreens tell me that many exquisite specimens can be obtained through catalogs, and our local nurseries occasionally carry a small number of different varieties that are worth trying.

Yews deserve mention in discussing the winter garden if for no other reason than that they are the most widely used evergreen in America, especially in formal foundation plantings. This great green beauty is used in every way from hedges to borders, screens, walls and topiaries, and now I'm trying yews as a ground cover. Taxus, the official name for yews, has many varieties and I purposefully selected "Ward" for this purpose.

This low-growing yew sends out long, fluffy branches that reach from the edges toward its neighbors. Over the years I have pruned

the center of each shrub to encourage lateral and discourage upright growth. As a result, I now have a bed of yew ground cover. It is evergreen, tidy, full and much more interesting throughout the year than the ivy or pachysandra I otherwise would have planted there.

Not only during the winter months but all through the year, I admire and respect the hardiness and beauty of the evergreen hollies. Ilex, as hollies are properly called, are the main element of landscaping on the shady side of our house and the rich acid soil in which they are planted seems to be just what they need.

Evergreen hollies with their stiff, leathery, dense green leaves with curly edges are hardy, undemanding and very desirable. Scatterings of red berries in the winter time are beautiful against the dark foliage and white snow. Pruning of my hollies goes on all year, as the cuttings provide stunning foliage for many flower arrangements. Long after the flowers are gone, the holly leaves are still crisp and beautiful.

I am rather proud of a small umbrella pine that has grown very well, planted in a protected corner near the house. Sciadopitys verticillata, as it is officially called, isn't used widely in our area because it is not reliably hardy. The umbrella pine bears dark green needles that are 3 to 5 inches long in whorls of 20 to 30 needles and is low and pyramidal in shape.

My plant has grown very slowly, but the literature on the umbrella pine suggests it will eventually pick up its rate of growth. If this evergreen is placed in a protected location and given one or two sprays of Wilt-Pruf during the winter, it has a good chance of surviving in our zone. The umbrella pine introduces an unusual point of interest in the winter scene, and I think it is worth a gamble.

The funny-looking, bent-over and screwed-up shrub I see out of the sunroom window is a member of the hazelnut group, Corylus, and is popularly known as "Hurry Launder's Walking Stick." Its stems, branches, twigs and tendrils are curled and extraordinarily twisted, making it a striking specimen.

At its best in the winter when all of its rather coarse and dull leaves have fallen, this plant, Corylus avellana contorta, is totally hardy and desirable, especially in a small landscaped area. The twisted clippings from the shrub are used extensively by florists and add a professional touch to one's own homemade flower arrangements throughout the year.

Over and above the low and interesting specimen shrubs are the trees. American Indians called tree the "Standing Nation," and knowing this label has helped me think of trees as a higher form of life than I had felt in the past.

The magnificent oaks, shagbark hickories, ash and even a few surviving elms are our great treasures. They are powerful neighbors who contribute beauty and strength to our surroundings. Their leafy mansions are gone now, and their arms and trunks are exposed. They are dramatic and comforting.

Unfortunately, the first sight one sees when coming up our driveway is a huge structure of snow fencing — not pretty. Each fall my husband surrounds the English boxwood hedge with wooden snow fencing to protect this old, delicate but very beautiful planting. The hedge was here when we moved into the house and the extra care it demands makes it a nuisance.

The small-leaved Korean boxwood, which is every bit as beautiful as the English boxwood, withstands snow and cold temperatures, and thrives in several areas of our yard without special protection, would certainly have been my choice. However, as long as Bob, my husband, is willing to erect the fence each year, the English beauty will be enjoyed.

Of course, I look forward to the tulips and the steady progression of bloom from May through September or even October. But the beauty of the evergreen stalwarts in the garden helps me enjoy the winter months and refrain from wishing my life away as I wait the first warm days of spring.

Marge Alpern is a Birmingham-based freelance writer and avid gardener.

Ball to benefit Polish art

Special attractions will be featured to celebrate the Bal Polonais 10th anniversary ball, scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 20, at the Detroit Athletic Club.

The traditional gala dinner-dance will benefit the Endowment Fund for Polish Art at the Detroit Institute of Arts, the fund for the Michigan Opera Theatre's Detroit Opera House restoration and other Polish cultural goals.

Admission per person is \$250 (Benefactor), \$175 (Patron) and \$125 (general). As a special feature, general admis-

sion will be \$100 per person for payments received by Saturday, Feb. 6. For information, call 642-2730 or 352-1805. Bal Polonais has been a major contributor to the Polish art collection at the DIA and was the major (\$60,000) sponsor for the MOT presentation of the opera "King Roger" by Karol Szymanowski last May. The formal presentation of the debutantes of Bal Polonais has become an established annual tradition of this festive evening, and is regarded as the most elegant presentation of its kind in this part of the country.

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Volunteer of Month good DIA saleswoman



An enthusiastic saleswoman, a highly creative fundraiser for the Detroit Institute of Arts Founders Society, Elizabeth Decker, a Farmington Hills resident, has served as a DIA volunteer for 13 years, following a successful 25-year career as an interior designer.

Her current activity is with the Museum Shop Committee, which she has chaired in the past. She works energetically in both the museum shop at the DIA and at its brand-new location at the Somerset Collection in Troy.

"I love working in the two shops. Both are in exciting surroundings but different," Landay said. "When we take our breaks at the museum, I can go spend time in the galleries. At Somerset, I can enjoy all that glitz."

Elizabeth Decker, manager of the Somerset store, calls Landay a "real professional."

"Our customers love her. She gives them the old-fashioned personal touch, helps them select gifts, and follows up. She knows what customer service means."

Besides her work with the museum shops, Landay has been a gallery information aide, has arranged tours for Day Away with the DIA, and has served on the Graphic Arts Council Board. Last year, she designed the council's Cleveland tour to major corporate

and private collections. Graphics is a major interest of Landay and her husband, Martin, chairman and CEO of Globe Trading Co. of Detroit. Their private collection includes prints and three-dimensional pieces by 20th century American artists such as Warhol, Johns and Lichtenstein, but extends to Picasso, Chagall and Clemente.

Landay is currently on the board of the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution, for whom November made a national reputation with her creative and successful Mailbox Auction fundraiser.

For that project she invited 130 renowned artists throughout the country to donate their talents by creating a mailbox, to be sold at auction. Artists included internationally known figures like Yoko Ono, John Chamberlain, Louise Bourgeois, Wendell Castle and Jenny Holzer. The project raised more than \$110,000.

Landay is also on the executive board of the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association.

The Landays are parents of four children, who live in locations throughout the country. They are world travelers and music theater fans.

For information on volunteering at the DIA, call 833-0247. The museum is open 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday.

The DIA museum shops are in three locations at the museum, open during museum hours, at Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi, open 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Saturday and noon to 6 p.m. Sunday; and at the Somerset Collection, open 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday, Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday, and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday.



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