



## Evergreens, Succulents, Perennials and Garden Art Brighten a Winter Landscape

*by Cecile Garrison, Master Gardener*

The kids deserted the swimming pool months ago and the recent freezing weather has reduced the Cannas, Cosmos and Zinnias to almost nothing. However, you can still have a colorful, interesting landscape using evergreens, succulents, perennials, and carefully placed garden art.

We discovered how perfect succulents are for this valley of hot, dry summers and cold, foggy winters about five years ago. It's amazing to watch a seemingly fragile *Sempervivum* such as 'Hens and Chicks' thrive whether it's foggy and thirty degrees or one hundred in the shade. I place most containers of succulents in winter protected areas, but succulents of all stripes and sizes are doing well in the ground with no protection from the elements.

Evergreen trees, shrubs, ground covers and vines contribute a variety of textures and a wide range of color in shades of blue and green. Many have berries for the birds to enjoy. A former owner of this property planted 140 Italian Cypress trees in the 1980's and I am in awe of the vision he had as he planted each tree. They are all over 60 feet tall and from almost any point on this 20-acre parcel you can see a pattern of one, three or five trees which make a perfect photo-opportunity. The 50 Cypress on each side of the drive makes it seem to go on forever.

There are many selections of evergreen trees available now. Seasonal live Christmas trees can be planted in the ground if they are properly watered and not subjected to excessive temperatures inside the house. Look for bargains in the garden centers between Christmas and New Years.

One of our favorite ground covers is *Cerastium* or Snow-in-Summer. It quickly spread to five feet, provides a silver glow during all seasons, and produces thousands of fragrant white flowers in spring and summer.

The list of flowers that bloom in winter is long but I will tell you about three especially lovely specimens I took pictures of today. The first is commonly known as wallflower and is from the genus *Erysimum*. I have yellow, purple, orange and brown blooming profusely in spite of the 28 degree temperature this morning. The perky green foliage is a bright spot in the landscape and the blooms are a definite bonus.

*Nemesia* is another fragile looking flower that scoffs at the frost. It has tiny snapdragon-shape flowers in a wide range of colors. All *Nemesia* must have afternoon shade in our hot summers. I grow 'Aromatica True Blue' and like its light fragrance. I purchased a four-inch pot at a coastal

nursery as an experiment knowing that Nemesia prefer cool weather. It has expanded to a three foot square area in two years so I think it likes it here.

The most reliable winter color we have is the orange and yellow Calendula. An evergreen herb it acts as a perennial in our gardens. It blooms profusely during the fall, winter and spring, is stressed in the summer but bounces back again in the fall. When the plant gets about two feet in diameter it usually loses its shape. By then it has reseeded itself many times so we discard the entire plant to make room for the new ones.

Garden art at every turn in the yard adds interest and cheer to an otherwise dreary, foggy day. Garden fairies and gnomes, deer, squirrels, rabbits, and other assorted garden statuary blend into the foliage and flowers in the other three seasons but are more noticeable and appreciated when the leaves have fallen and the Rose bushes are pruned.

So, if you need gift ideas for the gardener in your life, head to the nursery or garden center and pick up a succulent, an evergreen, or some colorful perennials. And, don't forget to leave room in the garden for the fairies to dance and the gnomes to roam!

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*The spires of Italian Cypress provide dramatic contrast to the deciduous tree drenched in fog.*



*The water maiden is flanked by containers of succulents.*



*The lavender blooms of Nemesia.*



*The orange and yellow blooms of Calendula*