

In Search of Evergreens

Pizzazz to get you through the drab

With leaves dropping around, it's kind of hard to say goodbye to the real gardening season. Unlike so many parts of the country where the winter months are spent sharpening tools and cleaning potting sheds, we have a choice. Fortunately for us here in Portland, our gardens don't have to go away completely. There is plenty to do outside on the dry days, even if it is just enjoying being outside without getting wet. You might wonder how to do this. Filemon in Northeast Portland wrote to ask the following question.



Get Dirty with Dan
BY DAN YOUNG

HI DIRTY DAN:

I need some advice. I've got all these bushes in my yard—some oakleaf hydrangeas, a couple of Japanese barberries, a few roses.... Well anyway, I've had beautiful fall color from some things—I love the burgundy leaves on the hydrangeas, and I couldn't be happier with the crape myrtle I put in last year, which was absolutely on fire with orange and gold up until a few days ago when the rain knocked off the last few leaves. All that stuff is so pretty up until winter sets in, but then it gets a little depressing to watch the whole garden become a barren wasteland in November. So I'm wondering, What can I put in that will be evergreen and pretty all winter long? I'm not so crazy about those perfect little Christmas-tree-looking things I always see in the nurseries this time of year—I want something with a little pizzazz to get me through these darker days. (As for the roses, they got covered in mildew and spots and stuff yet

again; I got sick of them and ripped them out, so I've got some room.) Can you suggest something lovely?

Oh Filemon, you did mention that you really liked the pizzazz of burgundy leaves? You might try the Chinese fringe flower, *Loropetalum chinense*. There are a number of cultivars on the market, many with dark purple leaves that persist through the winter. The added bonus is that they will give you a big show of hot pink flowers in the spring, and something tells me you might like that. *Loropetalum* can handle a variety of sun situations from full sun to partial shade—just don't let it dry out too much.

Another you might try to get your fingers on is *Rhamnus alaternus*, Variegata or variegated Italian buckthorn. The common name is misleading, but don't worry, there are no thorns. When it comes to

shrubs being handsome, this one certainly qualifies. Reddish stems are adorned with small green leaves, each edged in cream variegation. I have grown this large shrub in my garden before, and I can say it is easy and undemanding. Its branches also make great cut foliage perfect for holiday entertaining.

One last suggestion I could give are the bright and sunny leaves of Sundance, *Choisya ternata*. The golden Mexican mock orange really gives

its all. Sometimes I look at this plant and think that it might be almost too bright, but then I decide I still love it. A citrus relative, *Choisya* is hardy in Portland, only occasionally getting a tiny bit of damage in really cold weather. If you have the space on the north side of your house or a place that gets morning sun and afternoon shade, you should devote it to this plant. Filemon, I think you will really like this one, especially on dreary January days.

Recently someone contacted me with a request that I gladly will put out there to all of you. Our House of Portland, a nonprofit organization providing health and housing services to people with HIV/AIDS, has a garden that could use some



The Chinese fringe flower brings hot pink in the spring and can stand up to the Northwest's winter.

helping hands. Anyone interested in volunteering some time should contact volunteer director Kathryn Siebert at ksiebert@ourhouseofportland.org.

On another news note, the club Garden Friends is starting back up again. Members look like they have some fun events planned in the future. I'm sure this is another great way to meet like-minded gardening fanatics and learn a few things while you're at it. To find out more, contact Dave Kohl at dkohl@cu-portland.edu.

To reach DIRTY DAN, who will answer any and all of your gardening questions, simply e-mail dirtythegardener@yahoo.com.

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