Add interest to your winter landscape

The temperature is dropping as quickly as the leaves, which means your landscape may be looking a bit barren. Fortunately, visual interest in the landscape isn’t derived just from colorful summertime flowers.

If the area around your home is looking a bit drab, take time this winter to study the landscape and come up with a plan that will make it more attractive.

In the spring, summer and early fall, the landscape is still filled with bright, beautiful flowers and shrubs. These flowers and leaves often hide the beauty of the plant beneath all that color. Some trees, shrubs and plants feature interesting bark and limbs. The Japanese kerria, for example, boasts smooth, bright green stems which add a pop of color. Another option for winter color is the redosier dogwood, which offers bright red to blood red stems. Other forms of redosier dogwood have bright yellow or orange stems.

Other plants that have interesting bark during the winter include the seven-son-flower and the oakleaf hydrangea. In addition, as the bark exfoliates on the Heritage river birch it reveals a salmon-white color on the stems that darken to salmon-brown as the tree ages.

Gardeners looking for more than color should consider Harry Lauder’s walking stick. This small tree sports a twisted and gnarled branch structure that provides visual interest all year. The branches also sport pale yellow catkins in the winter. Corkscrew willow is another option that boasts twisty stems with the added bonus of bright green twigs.

Plants with showy, fleshy fruits and/or seed heads include deciduous holly, black and red chokeberry, heavenly bamboo and hawthorn, as well as ornamental grasses and sedges. There are several cultivars of deciduous holly with fruit colors in red, orange, yellow and red-orange, which provide great color in a winter landscape.

The fruit of chokeberry are blackish purple or glossy red. These plants often will sucker, forming large colonies. Chokeberry makes a nice planting when planted in groups or massing. The fruit of the heavenly bamboo shrub are spectacular, large panicles of bright red berries persisting through winter.

The hawthorn tree has several varieties native to Oklahoma. The fruit display can be spectacular into the winter with its vibrant red, scarlet, orange, yellow, purple or blue colors, depending on the species/cultivar.

Don’t forget about ornamental grasses for an interesting landscape. They offer vertical texture in a garden in addition to flower heads that change color as they mature. Think more muted tones
when it comes to color, including tan, gray, gold and brown. These grasses sway in the wind which gives the illusion of movement in the landscape.

If you’re looking for something that flowers in the middle of winter, consider winter jasmine, a broad-spreading mounded shrub. If Oklahoma experiences a mild winter, it can flower even earlier.

Witchhazel is another option for a winter-flowering plant. These plants flower from November through March and feature flowers that are yellow, orange or red.

And finally, winter honeysuckle flowers are creamy white and give off a very fragrant lemon scent. The flowers typically open in January, peak in February and, depending on the weather, may still be flowering in March.

Many other plants not mentioned have great winter characteristics. If you find you need to spruce up your winter landscape a little more, visit with your local Oklahoma State University Extension office, garden center, horticulture professional or do an online search to get more ideas. OSU Extension’s fact sheet publications on landscape plants also are great resources.