

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2009 • \$5.00

GREEN scene

**A Walk in
Winter**



THE PENNSYLVANIA HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

A WINTER'S

A large, mature tree with a thick, dark trunk and a dense canopy of bright red leaves stands in a snowy winter landscape. The ground is covered in a layer of white snow, and the background is a soft, out-of-focus white. The tree's branches are intricate and spread out, creating a complex pattern of red against the white. The overall scene is serene and captures the beauty of autumn foliage in winter.

On a snowy winter day, when things begin to get very gloomy indoors, I find myself drawn out of doors to take a walk. The activity in the garden, so evident in the spring and summer, now seems non-existent or negligible at first glance. But the winter walk reveals amazing subtle color combinations on the bark of trees,

branches, and even the tightly clasped buds.

The shapes and forms of deciduous trees and shrubs provide anatomy lessons in spinal support structures. I notice the newly fallen snow as it lies on the branches of the large evergreens, creating forms and patterns that are not as evident without it. Some ice crystals meld together, forming intricate patterns

atop a juniper (*Juniperus virginiana*, 'Blue Mountain'). I think of finely fashioned lace with a delicate sheen.

The snow can also push the boundaries of load-bearing branches to their limits. The trees hold loads weightlifters could only dream of. Flexible branches bending to the ground are like tightly drawn bows waiting for their arrows. As the snow begins to melt, the branches slowly relax and move back into their original poses. It is then that I realize that the garden is full of Olympian plant-athletes performing momentous feats of glory for our enjoyment.

New patterns, almost floral in form, are created by snow in the spaces between the leaves of an American holly. Against the cold, blue-white snow, variegated yucca (*Yucca flaccida*, 'Golden Sword') looks cleaner, brighter, and more intense than in the

WALK



Story by Eva Monheim

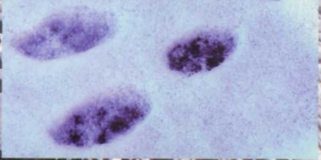


summer's heat. Snow accentuates the line of the leaves, making them appear bolder and more linear. Tufts of ornamental grasses look beach bound—stuck in snow/sand drifts.

I marvel at the seven-sons flower (*Heptacodium miconioides*) with its bark peeling vertically. The oversized shrub branches are bunched at the base and flare open at the top, creating a skeletal vase form. On those late winter days when the sun warms the

fragrant viburnum (*Viburnum farreri*), the flower buds begin to slowly swell. I take photos each day to capture the subtle changes until the day they finally pop open, filling the air with their spicy fragrance. Breathing in the aroma transports me to the plant's ancient Chinese home.

The massive winter or Ozark witch hazel (*Hamamelis vernalis*) opens its dainty thread-petaled flowers to release a sweet and pungent aroma. The amazing colors of winter jasmine (*Jasminum nudiflorum*) are rich green with rosy buds followed by a burst of brilliant



Photos by Lynn Kernetha and Tish Coleville

yellow flowers. The colors more than make up for the shrub's lack of fragrance. Brilliant red American holly (*Ilex opaca*) berries cling to their peduncles while waiting for the marauding robins that will return to pick them clean.

My imagination runs wild with delight as I walk onward through the garden. The frigid air swirls around me and reddens my cheeks, but I no longer feel it. Breathing in the cold moist air makes the senses more acute. I feel the ancient tug of new life waiting under the blankets of snow in the garden. I feel the

movement, subtle yet strong, of the roots thumping and bumping below the ground in their womb.

As I continue across the snowy landscape, with a crunch under foot, I imagine that I am the first explorer here. Then, just up ahead I discover that I am not alone. Another explorer has been here before me—a rabbit whose trail is much smaller than mine. It too has felt the connection, feeding off the wonders that the new fallen snow has accentuated. What a wonderful day for a winter walk. 🐰

Clockwise from top left:
Rabbit tracks in the snow

Yucca flaccida 'Golden Sword'

Ilex opaca 'Miss Helen'

Cercis chinensis 'Avondale'

Hamamelis vernalis

Ilex verticillata 'Winter Gold'