

For: October, 2009

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Want Winter Landscape Color-Try Ornamental Vegetables

Does your landscape lack color in the winter? Do you long to see color besides green in the winter? Did you know that there are vegetables that are attractive and colorful enough to use as winter annuals? Incorporating vegetables into the landscape or using them as decorative container plants for porches and patios is a great way to add color and interest to our winter gardens. During the 1600's, Potagers, or decorative kitchen gardens, were a part of the elaborate gardens at Versailles.

Ornamental cabbage is probably the most popular and widely used of the ornamental vegetables. But there are many other leafy vegetables that will perform well in our area.

Kale cultivars should be planted in late fall for winter and early spring interest. 'Lacinato', 'Red Bor', and 'Red Russian' are three of the varieties used by botanical gardens today as ornamentals. 'Lacinato' grows to a height of two feet and has thick and crinkled dark blue-green foliage. 'Red Bor' achieves a height of three feet and possesses dark purple ruffled leaves. 'Red Russian' is an interesting variety that grows to three feet. As the cooler weather sets in, its foliage changes from a blue-green to a purple-red color.

Mustard cultivars should be planted in early fall for best results. 'Red Giant' mustard, one of the more popular ornamental vegetables, has large bronze colored leaves with bright white midribs. Other mustards that have performed well include 'Early Mizuna', 'Komatsuna', 'Misome' and 'Miike Giant'.

Another ornamental vegetable that performs well in our area is the Swiss chard cultivar 'Bright Lights'. This variety is a favorite because of its multiple colored stems and crumpled foliage. I use this in my landscape as well as use it in salads. The colors are like a rainbow; reds, yellow, whites and orange. A mass planting of this plant is a car stopper. To me the plant tastes like beets.

