

## Bare Can Be Beautiful

There is a difference, Lewis Grizzard observed, between naked and nekkid. Naked simply means having no clothes on; nekkid is having no clothes on *and being up to something*. So it goes in the winter garden. Some plants sleep through the dormant season, undistinguished, while others can be a revelation.



Contorted mulberry is definitely up to something. On the nursery grounds an established plant provides a welcome spot of summer shade. Most people don't really notice it though until the leaves come down. Then the bizarre zig-zag pattern of the branches against the winter sky becomes a highlight of the season.

Another interesting mulberry is the weeping form, 'Pandora's Box'. Its more compact, arching and spreading form is also best appreciated while bare. Warm weather brings large leaves and the bonus of edible fruit.



Japanese Maples of all sorts bring lightness and asymmetrical grace to winter gardens in a way no evergreen could. 'Bloodgood' is a vigorous upright variety popular for its rich red summer foliage. 'Tamukeyama' has a spreading cascading form; wonderful in pots. Then there is the treelike coral bark maple, 'Sango Kaku', whose vivid coral-red twigs and branches are most apparent in winter. In our area these maples appreciate some shade and protection from wind. For this reason they make excellent

airy companions to the camellias and azaleas so prevalent in woodland gardens.

Sometimes a little naturalistic pruning can make all the difference in bringing greater presence and focus to otherwise common garden plants. Our native sparkleberry (*Vaccinium* sp.) is an excellent candidate for the kind of targeted thinning that reveals

the beauty and character of its twisting branches. Crape myrtle benefits also from pruning to accentuate the smooth sculptural quality of its mature wood.

Finally, there is the winter beauty of familiar fruits. Pears have a distinctive architecture, robust and ascending. Fig plants are more spreading, yet sturdy and bold even without a cover of leaves. Among persimmons there are a diversity of forms and sizes including weeping, compact and full size trees. The wonder here lies in the glowing orange to red fruit; often hanging on long after the glorious mantle of autumn foliage has departed.