

Guide to winter flowers

GWF434
Updated September 2007

Flashes of colour and the bare trees of the winter garden can create striking effects. This guide features bulbs, perennials and shrubs that will give a show in the depths of winter.

Bulbs

Groups of bulbs can be planted to give vivid winter displays.

Cyclamen coum is perfect for shady places and comes in three flower colours: deep pink, sugar pink 'Roseum' and white 'Album'. The flowers appear above the kidney-shaped green, silver or marbled leaves. In a mild winter, snowdrops, *Galanthus nivalis* may appear in time for Christmas, but for more reliable Christmas flowers, look out for *Galanthus* 'John Gray', a robust variety with large flowers.

Snowdrops prefer semi-shade and moist soil. For an unseasonable splash of blue or mauve, *Iris reticulata* bears a single, fragrant flower in the late winter. The exotic, pink blooms of *Nerine bowdenii* seem to appear from nowhere from September until November. For a sunny spot, the winter aconite, *Eranthis hyemalis*, is a cheerful sight, with bright yellow flowers and collars of shiny green leaves.

Perennials

If the weather is mild, some late perennial plants will still be flowering in November, such as *Schizostylis coccinea* 'Zeal Salmon' or *Chrysanthemum* 'Innocence'. Also, lily turf (*Liriope muscari*) with its strap-like foliage. The purple flower spikes appear from September to November. Hellebores are sought-

after garden plants with varieties that flower from December through to May. *Helleborus argutifolius* does well in sun or shade and bears pale green flowers. The Christmas rose, *Helleborus niger*, does not always come into flower in time to live up to its name, but you may have more luck with *Helleborus orientalis* 'Abchasicus' which has plum-coloured blooms. *Persicaria milletii* makes an ideal groundcover plant and gives excellent value. Its red flower spikes appear for up to five months between summer and winter. Lungwort, *Pulmonaria saccharata* makes a good ground cover for shaded areas. Its red-violet, violet or white flowers appear from late winter until late spring.

Trees and shrubs

Centre stage

These winter-flowering trees and shrubs add interest to the garden in winter, but also earn their keep year-round. The rosebud cherry, *Prunus x subhirtella* 'Autumnalis' is well worth planting in a prominent place, such as on the front lawn. It bears semi-double, white flowers that open from pink buds throughout winter. The stems make excellent Christmas decorations. In autumn, the leaves turn yellow. The witch hazel, *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Jelena' also deserves a spot in

the garden. It bears spidery, scented, orange blooms from December to January.

Winter show

Shrubs that look dazzling in winter but have less to offer for the rest of the year are best planted in a less prominent place or in a pot. Wintersweet, *Chimonanthus praecox* flowers from December to February. Cut stems of this shrub can fill a whole room with scent. *Viburnum bodnantense* 'Dawn' is a deciduous shrub with deep pink buds that open to pale pink, trumpet-like blooms smelling of honey and almonds. The winter honeysuckle *Lonicera purpusii* 'Winter Beauty' is not a climber, but forms a free-standing shrub. Fragrant, creamy flowers appear on bare stems in mid-winter.

Middle or back of border

Mahonia x media 'Lionel Fortescue' is good for the back of a border. Its scented, yellow flowers are held on upright stalks, like candles. These are surrounded by whorls of spiky evergreen foliage. *Viburnum tinus* 'Gwenllian' is a useful evergreen. It forms a loose dome of stems with pink-tinged flowers that can last up to 16 weeks. In a mixed border, *Daphne mezereum* will add clusters of deep pink flowers on bare, upright stems from December to April. These are followed by red berries (poisonous). It's a compact shrub

that will tolerate shade.

Cut flowers for Christmas

Cut the stems that have fully-formed flower buds in late November or early December and stand them in a bucket of water

in a cool, light room until their flowers start to open. Cut woody stems at an angle and remove leaves below the water level. If the room is too warm, the buds may dry out before they open -

prevent this by misting with water. Encourage stems to flower early, they should be cut no longer than two months before the plant would normally come into flower.

	Deciduous (D) Evergreen (E)	Colour	Scented	Flower Period
Bulbs				
<i>Cyclamen coum</i>	n/a	pink, white	✗	Nov-Mar
<i>Cyclamen hederifolium</i>	n/a	pink	✓	Sep-Dec
<i>Eranthis hyemalis</i> (winter aconite)	n/a	yellow	✗	Jan-Feb
<i>Galanthus caucasicus</i>	n/a	white	✗	Nov-Mar
<i>Galanthus nivalis</i> (common snowdrop)	n/a	white	✓	Jan-Mar
<i>Galanthus</i> 'John Gray'	n/a	white	✗	Nov-Dec
<i>Iris reticulata</i>	n/a	blue/purple	✓	Feb-Mar
<i>Iris unguicularis</i>	n/a	mauve	✓	Feb-Mar
<i>Narcissus</i> varieties	n/a	yellow, cream, white	✓	Feb-Mar
<i>Nerine bowdenii</i>	n/a	pink	✓	Sep-Nov
<i>Scilla mischtschenkoana</i> (squill)	n/a	pale blue	✗	Jan-Feb
Perennials				
<i>Adonis amurensis</i>	n/a	yellow	✗	Jan-Mar
<i>Helleborus argutifolius</i>	n/a	pale green	✗	Jan-Mar
<i>Helleborus orientalis</i> 'Abchasicus'	n/a	purple/green	✗	Dec-Feb
<i>Helleborus niger</i> 'Potter's Wheel' (Christmas rose)	n/a	white	✗	Jan-Mar
<i>Liriope muscari</i> (lily turf)	n/a	violet/mauve	✗	Sep-Nov
<i>Persicaria milletii</i>	n/a	red	✗	Jul-Nov
<i>Pulmonaria saccharata</i> (lungwort)	n/a	red/violet, white	✗	Feb-Apr
Trees and Shrubs				
<i>Arbutus unedo</i> (strawberry tree)	E	white/pink	✗	Oct-Dec
<i>Chimonanthes praecox</i> (wintersweet)	D	yellow	✓	Dec-Feb
<i>Cornus mas</i> (cornelian cherry)	D	yellow	✗	Feb
<i>Daphne laureola</i> (spurge laurel)	E	yellow/green	✓	Jan-Mar
<i>Daphne mezereum</i> (mezereon)	D	pink/purple	✓	Dec-Apr
<i>Erica carnea</i> (heath) varieties	E	various	✗	Jan-Mar
<i>Fatsia japonica</i>	E	cream	✗	Oct-Dec
<i>Garrya elliptica</i> 'James Roof'	E	silver catkins	✗	Jan-Feb
<i>Hamamelis x intermedia</i> 'Jelena' (witch hazel)	D	orange	✓	Dec-Jan
<i>Hamamelis mollis</i> (witch hazel)	D	yellow	✓	Dec-Jan
<i>Jasminum nudiflorum</i> (winter jasmine)	D	yellow	✓	Nov-Feb
<i>Lonicera fragrantissima</i>	D	cream	✓	Jan-Mar
<i>Lonicera x purpusii</i> 'Winter Beauty'	D/semi E	white	✓	Jan-Mar
<i>Lonicera standishii</i>	D/semi E	cream	✓	Nov-Mar
<i>Mahonia x media</i> 'Lionel Fortescue'	E	yellow	✓	Nov-Feb
<i>Parrotia persica</i>	D	red	✗	Nov-Dec
<i>Prunus x subhirtella</i> 'Autumnalis' (rosebud cherry)	D	white/pink	✗	Oct-Mar
<i>Sarcococca hookeriana</i> 'Digyna'	E	white	✓	Jan-Feb
<i>Viburnum x bodnantense</i> 'Dawn'	D	pink	✓	Jan-Mar
<i>Viburnum farreri</i>	D	pink	✓	Nov-Mar
<i>Viburnum tinus</i> 'Gwenllian'	E	white	✗	Nov-Feb