

# THE GARDEN IN WINTER

*‘Summer’s lease has all too short a date’.* William Shakespeare

Some of the cherries have lovely barks.

1. **Prunus serrula**
2. **Arbutus undedo** has deep orange stems and bark that is always in tatters, a characteristic shared with the paper-bark maple.
3. **Acer griseum**, the paper-bark maple, so-called because the bark peels off like paper.
4. **Acer davidii**, the snake bark maple.
5. **Eucalyptus gunnii**, which does grow into a big tree but can be kept coppiced by cutting the juvenile foliage (eg for flowering arranging) each year.
6. **Betula pendula** (if you plant a young tree the bark will be brown for its first 3 or 4 years before gradually changing into the silvery white which gives it its name. Even more dramatic is
7. **Betula utilis Jacquemontii** which looks as if it has been given a coat of paint.

Both look stunning against a green background particularly with spring bulbs planted at their feet.

Two brambles also have dramatic white stems,

8. **Rubus cockburnianus** ‘Goldenvale’ has golden yellow foliage and beautiful arching white stems. RHS award of merit but it is big at 2.5m
9. **Rubus thibetanus** for town gardens *Rubus thibetanus* is smaller and more suitable and has pretty leaves for summer.

Another plant group with coloured stems is the willows. There are 4 top willows for colourful winter stems. These will grow into trees if left unpruned, but can be pollarded annually to get the benefit of their stems. Probably only suitable for the larger garden.,

10. **Salix alba ‘Britzensis’** ♀ is a male clone which has bright orange stems,
11. **Salix irrorata** has white blooms and makes a large erect bush with purple stems with a white bloom on them.
12. **Salix gracilistyla** has lovely catkins

**13. *Salix acutifolia* ‘Blue Streak’** 🌿 has blue black shoots with a vivid blue black stem

Prune these willows annually by cutting them to the ground in late spring to get a multi-stemmed effect.

Then there are the wonderful cornus,

**14. *Cornus alba siberica* ‘Westonbert’** 🌿 is good for smaller gardens as it is less vigorous than the species, and this can be the effect of cornus in a winter garden.

**15. *Cornus stolonifera* ‘Flaviramea’.** 🌿 The bright green stems will cheer the dullest day.

Both of these shrubs should be cut to the ground in early spring.

**16. *Cornus flaviramea* ‘Flame’** in summer 1.5m

You wouldn't want all these plants grown for their winter stem colour unless you had lots of space. If you have to choose one I suggest *Cornus Alba* ‘Westonbirt’.

If you are growing plants for the effect of their stems or trunks, it is really helpful if they can be grown in a part of the garden with least shade. The effect of sunlight on these coloured stems is magical. Ideally, they should be at the back of a sunny border so that in the summer they are screened by other summer flowering plants. This is because the foliage of cornus and willow is on the dull side. The trees, of course, are a different matter, but placing them in town gardens is often a matter of fitting them in where possible, but if they are being grown for their bark remember the winter sun effect.

Now we come on to the plants that flower in winter and add fragrance to the winter garden. One tree that is indispensable to the winter garden is the *Hamamelis* or Witch Hazel. No garden should be without one because they are such a cheering sight in January when the delicate spidery flowers appear on bare branches.

**17. *Hamamelis mollis***

They are really best grown on their own as a specimen tree. Dappled shade suits them best. As the flowers have a wonderful smell you could try to plant them somewhere where you will be walking past them regularly. They prefer a retentive lime-free soil and dappled shade, and in such conditions you will get good autumn colour as well as the early winter flowering.

**18. *H. x intermedia* ‘Diane’** 🌿 has dark red flowers in mid to late winter and has the bonus of lovely autumn foliage as well.

**19. *H. pallida***

**20. *Azara microphylla*** 🌿 is an unusual upright evergreen tree or large shrub, which has

dark foliage and small lemon yellow flowers which in mild spells during February and March release strong vanilla fragrance. It is very hardy and tolerates full shade. Looks good grown against a wall.

**21. Chimonanthus praecox** – The Winter sweet – If you already have one of these then you are lucky. They can take several years before they flower but then the wonderful waxy lanterns drip from the branches from December until March. The Winter sweet likes a sunny position but will put up with fairly poor dry soil. Its scent is one of the most powerful of the season and if you can plant it near a window, the scent will travel through the whole house.

**22. Daphne mezereum rubra** is the most easily available form and has a white variety called ‘Alba’.

**23. Daphne bholua ‘Jacqueline Postill’** 🌸 is a deciduous form and produces flowers from December to March. Daphnes are slow growing but attractive shrubs, but really prefer an alkaline soil, so don’t thrive in our neutral to acid conditions here as well as they might.

Daphnes look lovely under-planted by Winter Heath or Erica carnea cultivars such as ‘Springwood White’

Still with scent we come to the **Viburnams**. Viburnams are often described as dull shrubs and not worth getting excited about, but I have a sneaking fondness for them. They are sometimes described as coarse, but I prefer to see them as rugged and uncomplaining. There are over 150 species of viburnums and some are only suited for a wild garden, but one or two are useful in winter, and make invaluable structural plants to support their more flamboyant garden partners.

**24. Viburnum bodnatense** is a hybrid of Viburnum farreri and is mainly grown as its 3 cultivars, or which ‘Dawn’ is the most popular and easily available. I’m sure you know it. It certainly is one of the stars of winter.

**25. Viburnum ‘Davidii’** on the other hand isn’t a star but does an excellent back-up job. It is rather too often used in supermarket car parks and not well looked after. It doesn’t like compacted soil or being walked over, but if given space, good soil and moderate sunlight, it is a truly handsome plant and has a RHS Award of Merit to prove it. It won’t be a star of the winter garden but will be good foil to support the more flamboyant neighbours. It has white flowers and black berries in autumn.

**26. Viburnum tinus** is a viburnum that you may want to put into a corner to hide something, as it is a very useful tolerant plant. Two cultivars,

**27. V. ‘Eve Price’** and

**28. V. Gwennllian** both flower through the winter.

**29. Winter Jasmine – Jasmine nudiflorum.**

Great for a long flowering period in Winter from November until April, and grows in shade as well as sun. It can be trained to grow up a wall or to form a hedge, but possibly looks its best cascading down a bank or covering a feature that needs to be hidden. It can be difficult to train so that it looks good and I feel it needs a lot of space to make the best of itself.

Red and orange flowers are rare in the winter garden, so the

**30. Chaenomoles japonica**, flowering quince or japonica are especially welcome. They are gloriously coloured, come out early and last for months. This is **Knap Hill Scarlet**.

**31.** But if you want a more delicate apple blossom coloured japonica, then **Speciosa Moerloosei** will give you dense clusters of flowers and a tricky name. Another RHS award of merit plant. Japonicas can be grown as shrubs where they perform best in full sun, or can be trained against a wall. In either case prune and do your wall-training in spring once they have finished flowering.

**32. Mahonia x intermedia ‘Charity’** is a shrub you will all know well, but it does make a valuable contribution in winter.

**33.** This one is called **Mahonia lomariifolia**

**34. Abeliophyllum dischitum** is a rare (but Binny Plants sells it) Korean native plant whose flowers resemble forsythia. The flowers open in February, and are pale pink and fragrant. Grow in a sheltered sunny bed and cut back hard after flowering. As the shrub is not very attractive in the summer it should be placed behind herbaceous perennials that will conceal it until they are cut down in autumn.

**35. The Winter Box or Sarcococca**, is a bit of a treasure because it can be planted in the shade in a sheltered place in relatively dry soil. The evergreen leaves are bushy and shiny and the flowers are hidden, but are very fragrant so that one can walk past a box and not realise where the lovely smell is coming from. This is

**36. Sarcococca ruscifolia** which grows to about 1m.

**37. Sarcococca confusa** is 2m x 1m

**38. Sarcococca hookeriana var digyna** 1.5m x 2m

**39. Clematis cirrhosa ‘Freckles’** an evergreen climber that is especially useful for winter. This one comes from the Balearic Islands and does best planted in a sheltered position in full sun and flowers in early spring. It was also scramble happily up trees to about 3m

**40. Lonicera purpusii ‘Winter Beauty’** is a shrubby honeysuckle, not a climbing one which has very scented white flowers in early spring. Lovely but quite big at 2m high.

A few plants that aren't fragrant or particularly winter flowering but are very useful as punctuation marks in the mixed border. They give you something to look at and a bit of structure in the winter and have jolly flowers later in the year.

**41. Pieris japonica ‘Forest Flame’** will grow to 4m so is a rather large punctuation mark, but will grow happily in quite a lot of shade and the red bracts are very rewarding for quite a long time in early summer

**42.** There are some smaller cultivars such as **P. ‘Debutant’**

43. And '**Little Heath**' is to be particularly recommended. Pierises are plants like rhododendrons that will only grow on acid soil so we are much envied by those who dwell on alkaline for being able to have them in our gardens.
44. **Leucothoe** is another acid grower which also has the advantage of growing in semi-shade. **L. Scarletta** is a small filler growing to about 30cm.
45. **Skimmia** is not a glamorous plant but there is a variety called **Skimmia 'Kew Green'** which is an excellent winter interest for the mixed border.
46. **Skimmia japonica 'Rubella'** is a compact male form with dark red flower buds in winter that open to white in spring.
47. **Prunus subhirtella 'Autumnalis'**. I mentioned trees that have good winter bark, but there are a couple of winter flowering trees that if you have space are terrific. **Prunus subhirtella 'Autumnalis'** eventually forms a sizeable tree with spreading branches. The flowers appear before the leaves over a long period from late autumn to early spring and sometimes it will flower again. In addition the tree has lovely autumn colouring, and although this slide doesn't show it, an attractively lined trunk.
48. **Prunus davidiana 'Alba'**

Hellebores are one of the great pleasures of the winter garden. They flower for a long time and the blossoms are a great delight

49. **Helleborus foetidus** is a good green foliage plant and has delicate green flowers edged with maroon. The plant looks excellent if planted with the rounded shape of *bergenia* and *tellima* and the upright spears of *Iris foetidissima*.
50. **Helleborus corsicus** will grow in dense shade and poor soil. Cut down the spent flowers and leaves in spring and the new foliage will contribute to the summer garden.
51. **Helleborus hybrid**. There are lots and lots of hellebore hybrids. They thrive in light shade in rich moisture retentive soil and do best if fed during the spring and summer.
52. **Helleborus niger 'Praecox'** the Christmas rose which doesn't in fact flower at Christmas but later in the winter. Plant with spotted *pulmonarias*, snowdrops.
53. Winter aconites *Eranthis hyemalis*
54. The other early bulb is of course the snowdrop. The earliest snowdrop in Scotland was seen on 18<sup>th</sup> January last year (somewhere in S Scotland). Plant them when the leaves are still green, divide them every few years and increase your stock and give them a handful of bone meal when they have finished flowering as a reward. Snow drops can be seen at Dalmeny, in Cammo walled Gardens and at Cambo House. They blend attractively with *Iris reticulata* and crocuses.
55. **Anemone blanda**. Anemones start flowering in February and come into their glory in March. Grows happily in semi-shade as well as in the sun.

56. **Scillas** are excellent bulbs which don't seem to vanish half as much as some of the early spring bulbs like irises.
57. **Chionodoxa luciliae** like scillas are trouble free and are also good for naturalising. They seed freely and multiply rapidly but in a nice restrained way.
58. There are so many crocus that they could be a separate subject. **Crocus chrysanthus Cream Beauty** is good reliable variety.
59. Dwarf narcissi are a great delight. **February Gold** is one of the earliest.