

From the fragile scent of snowdrops to the blood-red berries of pyracantha, there

The winter garden

are plenty of plants that will provide colour, fragrance and ethereal shapes during the coldest season of the year

THIS PAGE The feathered catkins of *Salix caprea*, more commonly known as pussy willow, bring welcome interest to the frozen landscape. **OPPOSITE PAGE** Recognised by its distinctive yellow blooms that appear from December to February, the Chinese witch hazel, *Hamamelis mollis*, also contributes a wonderfully sweet fragrance to the winter garden.



A successful winter garden needs to be planned in advance – colour, fragrance and bountiful shape are all readily available as long as you select the right plants and have them in place in good time, ready to perform. If you choose well, unexpected snow-falls or a frost will enhance and adorn your plot,

but you will still need to take care of your plants throughout this otherwise dormant season. To help you do this successfully, we have asked a number of head gardeners working in the great houses and parks across Britain to reveal their top tips and methods of making certain that next year's winter garden is a sure-fire success. ►

Creating a winter garden

Flowers Galanthus (snowdrops), crocus, *Iris unguicularis*, hellebores (species and hybrids) and winter-flowering erica (heathers).

Fragrant winter-flowering trees and shrubs *Daphne odorata* (winter daphne), *Hamamelis mollis* (witch hazel), *Jasminum nudiflorum* (winter jasmine), *Lonicera fragrantissima* (honeysuckle) and *Cornus alba* (dogwood) for its wonderful fragrance and coloured stems.

Colourful fruits and berries Ilex (holly), pyracantha, *Skimmia japonica*, cotoneaster, *Laurel aucuba*, sorbus, along with smaller, weeping forms of willow, such as *Salix caprea* 'Kilmarnock'.

The unusual *Arbutus unedo* (the strawberry tree), which fruits and flowers simultaneously.

PLANTING TIMETABLE

Consider each plant's position in relation to the house so that you have the best view of them.

Early autumn Plant winter iris and crocus in September

Late-autumn or winter Plant bare-rooted trees as long as the ground is not frozen or water-logged. Some hardy plants can be purchased in their full winter glory, and safely planted up, including *Jasminum nudiflorum*, daphne, winter sweet, mountain ash, dogwood, berberis, viburnum, skimmia, pot-grown pyracantha, *Salix caprea* 'Kilmarnock', winter aconites, and *Bergenia crassifolia*.

Early spring snowdrops en masse, in the green.

Autumn or spring Holly, hellebores, pyracantha, chaenomeles (flowering quince), witch hazel, aucuba, *Arbutus unedo* (strawberry tree), camellias and early flowering varieties, such as *Camellia x williamsii* and *C. reticulata*, are better planted in lime-free soil.

HEAD GARDENERS' TOP TIPS

Debs Goodenough, head gardener at Osborne House, Isle of Wight, 0870 333 1181, english-heritage.org.uk/osbornehouse, suggests:
"Cut frost-endangered stems of forsythia and *Erica arborea* that are already in bud, and take these into the house to bring on and enjoy rather than lose them altogether."

Christopher Ellis, head gardener at Cherkley Court, Surrey, 01372 380980, cherkeleycourt.com, says:
"To get the best show of hellebore flowers and reduce the risk of virus, carefully remove last year's foliage to expose new flower shoots as they emerge. Destroy foliage and sterilise secateurs."

Mark Jackman, head gardener at Hartwell House, 01296 747444, hartwell-house.com, recommends:
"To maintain brightly coloured stems of dogwood, cut back to between 3cm and 5cm from the ground in March and mulch well."

Robert Owen, Head Gardener at Bodysgallen Hall, Snowdonia, 01492 584466, bodysgallen.com, warns:
"Protect camellias from frost damage by planting away from frost pockets in the garden; for instance, beneath a tree where it can bathe in afternoon but not morning sun. A species is different to a variety and tends to be hardier, so protect the latter with fleece when necessary."

Sam Tippings, assistant head gardener, Coughton Court, Warwickshire, 01789 400777, coughtoncourt.co.uk, advises:
"For winter berries with holly, ensure there are male and female trees or shrubs in close proximity to each other as both are required to ensure berry production."

Where to buy winter plants

Most garden centres and nurseries will stock plants in season, or you can order bare-rooted (often much cheaper) and potted specimens from specialist nurseries.

Blackmoor Nurseries, 01420 473576, blackmoor.co.uk, supplies bare-rooted fruit trees.

Crown Nursery, 01394 460755, crown-

nursery.co.uk, specialises in evergreen plants for year-round structure.

Kirkdale Nursery, 01467 671264, kirkdalenursery.co.uk, specialises in bare-rooted native, ornamental trees as well as hedging and conifers.

Walnut Tree Garden Nursery, 01953 488163, wtgn.co.uk, sells a wide range of hardy shrubs. ■



The long-flowering *Chaenomeles speciosa* or ornamental quince.



A frost-laden *Camellia* begins to unfurl its rosy petals



The distinctive flowers of hardy *Hamamelis mollis*.



Cornus alba or dogwood, is a popular choice for ornamental landscaping.



Winter-flowering **crocuses** come into their own during the colder months.



Delicate pink *Helleborus* 'Party Dress'.



What is this? *Helleborus* ??????????



Hard pruning of *Cornus alba* produces stems with rich red winter colour.



In season *Helleborus picotee* is heavily laden with flowers.



Snowdrops are the among the first bulbs to flower in spring.



The closed buds of *Helleborus niger* bend under the weight of the snow.



The blood-red pomes of *pyracantha* mature in late autumn.

CLICK

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WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS JACKY HOBBS

NEXT MONTH CONES