

DO FLOWERS BLOOM IN THE WINTER?

Well, there you are sitting at your kitchen table in February, remembering all the perennials you had blooming so beautifully last summer. As you sip on your hot cup of Java you wistfully wish the grey darkness could at least come alive with some color. Does anything bloom in the winter?

Glad you asked, as here are three exciting winter bloomers that will break up the shades of gray in your winter garden:

- ✓ **Camellia**
- ✓ **Winter Jasmine**
- ✓ **Hellebore**

With Camellia, observe the intricate and dainty petals peering at you from the gloom. Get the wonderful *C. japonica* to see the flowers from mid-winter to early spring. The more winter sun, the better for these fine examples of a winter bloomer. Plant in a morning sun-only location and keep well watered over the summer months to enjoy the winter blooms. The flowers range from white to pink to red and attract early pollinators while the foliage provides winter protection for the birds. It prefers well-drained soil and a lower pH (5.5-6.5 range).

Winter Jasmine (*Jasminum nudiflorum*) is a wonderfully versatile small shrub that puts on gorgeous dainty yellow blooms in the middle of winter. Yes, yellow, can you believe it? That color will spice up any winter landscape. In the summer it is a well behaved globular shaped, 1-3' tall shrub with a rich green leaf color. Full sun in the winter and summer will suit these industrial strength bloomers simply fine, but they can take a half day of shade in our Oklahoma heat. It is a good cascading plant and can take root where branches touch the soil but can easily be dislodged to prevent spreading. Its name actually means, "the flower that welcomes Spring".

At plant nurseries in the winter months the Hellebores are many and varied. Their blooms can be remarkably interesting with a face down orientation. Newer varieties now have flowers that face upwards to the sky. Purple, blue, maroon, pink, white, yellow, and every combination in-

between are the colors that adorn the unusual blossom. The “blooms” are actually sepals that protect the true flowers. In the summer they prefer a shady location with rich, well-drained soil. The name is derived from Greek words meaning “injuring food” which means all parts of them are highly toxic. It is even recommended to use gloves when handling these beautiful bloomers. Hellebores can continually bloom from February until May. They are often blooming before Easter, thus their common name of Lenten Rose. By the way, one of the best ways to acquire one of these unique plants is to have a friend give you one for Christmas!

So, finish that cup of coffee and bring home one of these winter bloomers as it is quite alright to plant them now. Plan to plant in the warmest part of the day and do not allow the roots to be exposed in the cold air. Dig and prepare your planting hole the same depth as the plant was in its container, remove the plant from its container and water well. Pour yourself a fresh cup of brew and enjoy!

KW