WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION
Master Gardener Program

Winter Flowering Shrubs

Winter-flowering shrubs should be used far more often in our Puget Sound gardens. The combination of a temperate maritime climate and soils that are predominantly acid seems to be just right for many of these plants.

Our gray, overcast winter weather can be brightened with a spot of color strategically placed in the garden. In addition, some of the most pleasantly scented plants bloom during this season, giving an added dimension to the winter garden. Such plants are particularly effective when used in garden areas that are close to walkways and entryways to the house.

Check our local nurseries for some of the following shrubs. The best time to shop for them is during the winter when they are in flower.

Viburnum x bodnantense is a medium to large deciduous shrub. After it drops its leaves in fall, it produces clusters of small, pink, fragrant flowers, often throughout the entire winter. The branches are excellent for cutting and forcing in the house.

Mahonia x media 'Charity' is an exotic-looking relative of our native Oregon grape that can get 10 feet or more in height. Sprays of yellow flowers appear in late autumn and last into winter and will be visited by overwintering hummingbirds. Waxy black berries appear in summer and are favored by robins and other birds.

Hamamelis mollis and ***H. x intermedia*** are the witch hazels. They are vase-shaped deciduous shrubs that can easily become a small tree. They produce an abundance of rich golden- or red-toned flowers in January and February. *H. mollis* is the most fragrant of the genus, with a rich, spicy fragrance.

Corylopsis pauciflora is known as the buttercup winter hazel. In February, bare branches are adorned with clusters of pale yellow flowers. Its naturally graceful growth pattern requires little or no pruning.

Sarcococca confusa and ***S. ruscifolia*** are attractive, glossy-foliaged evergreen shrubs that thrive in shade. Both produce small white vanilla-scented flowers. Plant near a doorway, preferably on the north or east side of the house. The fragrance of the winter flowers can be strong, and one branch cut for indoor use will easily fill a room with its scent.

Daphne odora is a low-growing evergreen looking somewhat like a rhododendron. However, its small, rosy-purple flowers produced in February and March tell you it's a daphne. This is the so-called winter daphne, and it's reputed to have the most fragrant flower in the genus.

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Ribes sanguineum is our native flowering current. Late winter and early spring flowers of this deciduous shrub have a spicy fragrance and attract overwintering hummingbirds.

Stachyurus praecox is a large deciduous shrub with graceful arching stems. In late winter, pendulous, yellow flowers are lightly scented and provide early foraging for bees.

The ***Ericas***, or heaths, are generally low-growing shrubs with narrow, needle-like leaves. They produce white, rose, red, or purple bell-shaped flowers. Many varieties of ***Erica carnea*** bloom throughout the winter. They do best in full sun.

Other woody plants that flower during the winter include ***Camillia sasanqua, Garrya elliptica*** (coast silk tassel), ***Chaenomeles speciosa*** (flowering quince), ***Cornus mas*** (cornelian cherry) and a few rhododendrons. Don't forget other plants that flower during winter, including perennials. ***Bergenia, Helleborus, Epimedium,*** some cyclamens, winter aconite, and primulas will all perform well in winter gardens in our area.

A visit to the **Witt Winter Garden** in the **Washington Park Arboretum** in Seattle between late November and early March is an opportunity to experience plants that shine at that time of year. A short walk from the Graham Visitors Center, the Garden features a central lawn encircled by tall cedars and firs and a tremendous assortment of smaller trees, shrubs and perennials. Jointly managed by the University of Washington Botanic Gardens and the City of Seattle, the Arboretum's 230 acres are a dynamic assortment of plants, some found nowhere else in the Northwest. The Arboretum is open to the public every day, dawn to dusk, free of charge. More information can be found at the UW Botanic Gardens website: botanicgardens.uw.edu

The gardens at the **Center for Urban Horticulture**, part of the University of Washington Botanic Gardens, contain many winter flowering plants including viburnums, witch hazels, daphnes and hellebores. The gardens are open free to the public every day, dawn to dusk. Learn more at: botanicgardens.uw.edu/center-for-urban-horticulture

The **Bellevue Botanical Garden** includes many plants that provide winter interest, including flower and fragrance. Its 53 acres are open free to the public every day, dawn to dusk. Learn more at www.bellevuebotanical.org

A listing of other PNW public gardens can be found on the **Elisabeth C. Miller Library** website: depts.washington.edu/hortlib/resources/hort_web_sites/arboreta.php - pnw

Great Plant Picks, *greatplantpicks.org*, is a valuable resource for Pacific Northwest gardeners, where more detailed information on many of these winter bloomers can be found, as well as about 1000 other plants that do well in our Northwest gardens. *Great Plant Picks* is the primary educational program of the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden.

Additional Master Gardener Tip Sheets, including "Gardening Websites" and "Gardening Publications" are available at kingcountymg.org Also see WSU's "Gardening in Washington State" at gardening.wsu.edu and free downloads of WSU gardening publications at pubs.wsu.edu

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