



Winter Wow Factor

ADD INTEREST TO YOUR GARDEN WITH THIS SELECTION OF UNIQUE WINTER FLOWERING PLANTS.

by David Musker - The Jindivick Country Gardener

Many plants are at their best in the cooler months of the year, flowering when other plants are heading for dormancy. These plants are well worth considering as additions to your garden to add year round interest. Used to highlight dark corners, add contrast or for the element of surprise, here are a few that I love.

1. Mahonia

There are around 70 species of Mahonia, an evergreen shrub native to the Himalayas, South East Asia and North and Central America. Grown for their attractive architectural foliage the bright yellow flowers in winter are followed by blue-black berries. In this country they perform best in the shade or semi shade protected from the hot afternoon sun, which can scorch the large leathery leaves. They are the perfect plant for that shady, dry spot in the corner of your garden where nothing has ever done well in the past.

Mahonia *japonica* is a dramatic shrub growing up to three metres high. It has deep green leaves that are rather prickly and tough and sweetly scented soft yellow flowers in mid-winter. Its appearance is lush and architecturally striking, a perfect highlight in a dark corner.

Mahonia *japonica* 'Bealei' has larger leaves than some of the other varieties and has a grey green appearance with paler yellow flowers in winter. This plant can handle full sun well. It produces multiple stems of different heights over time and again is dry tolerant.

Mahonia *lomariifolia*, is a large shrub growing up to four metres high, with mid green leaves and deep yellow flowers in mid-winter. This is an amazing plant if left to its own devices. In the right position it will add a 'wow' to any garden but remember it loves shade and dry!

2. Callicarpa *japonica* is a hardy deciduous shrub growing to two metres tall. It performs well in full sun or semi shade and seems to be fairly drought hardy. Its leaves turn a soft mauve in autumn before dropping to reveal the amazing purple berries, which develop along the stems after flowering in autumn. This plant is a must if

you love purple. Callicarpa *bodinieri* var. *giraldii*, grows to three metres high and has vibrant mauve berries. Either callicarpa will add a splash of colour to your garden in winter and both are charming shrubs all year round.

3. Garrya *elliptica* 'James Roof' is a very hardy evergreen shrub growing to four metres high and wide if left unpruned. It has rounded mid green leaves that handle full sun easily. As a shrub it is mildly attractive but it comes into its own in winter when it flowers. At this time it produces long cream catkins of up to 20 cm that hang down from the branches making the whole plant look like a chandelier. An excellent windbreak, hedge or garden shrub - espaliered it displays its' amazing catkins to perfection.

4. Corylus *avellana* 'Contorta', (Crazy Filbert or Contorted hazel), is a hardy shrub growing to two metres high. As its name implies, its stems are dramatically twisted and contorted. It is a deciduous shrub and certainly looks fantastic when it has lost its rather floppy and uninteresting leaves to reveal the stems and catkins that appear on the bare stems over winter. It is very popular with florists but is hard to get as the plant is relatively slow growing and not many gardeners would willingly cut it down for flower arrangements- it's too special as a garden wonder!

5. For a 'wow' with stems look no further than Cornus *stolonifera* 'Flaviramea', (yellow stemmed bush dogwood) or Cornus alba 'Sibirica', (red stemmed bush dogwood). These two plants are absolutely at their best in the cold of winter when their bare stems become stronger in colour - a dramatic thicket of yellow stems will enhance any garden. Cornus alba 'Sibirica', (red-stemmed dogwood) is similarly dramatic. Both are bushes not reaching more than 1.5 metres high. They don't like strong hot winds, but who does? Other than that they are reliable plants that have good shape, good autumn leaf colour and excellent stem colour in winter.