

Rachel's Plant Picks

By Rachel Anderson

Do not despair for lack of flowers in your garden at this time of year! In the Pacific Northwest our mostly temperate climate allows us to grow many plants that bloom in the fall through winter and on into spring. With careful planning and plant selection, your garden can have something blooming all year long! I've made a month by month list of perennials and shrubs that bloom during our coldest darkest days, beginning in November and continuing into March. Sometimes the bloom times may differ depending on the weather, with warmer temperatures causing buds to open sooner than normal and cooler temperatures keeping the buds tightly furled until better conditions come along. Also, the timing will depend a little on where you live, with coastal areas usually being a bit warmer than areas in the foothills. A few of these plants are ones that everybody knows and some are a bit more obscure. Hopefully you'll find something new to try!

November:

- ***Mahonia x media* 'Charity'**: one of my favorites! (I promise not to say that after every plant!) An evergreen shrub hardy to zone 7 with lemon yellow flowers. Hummingbirds adore this plant!
- ***Arbutus unedo* 'Compacta'**: this plant is a four season all-star!
- ***Cyclamen hederifolium***: Starts blooming in October and carries through November. It has beautiful foliage once the flowers fade. Very sweet.

December:

- ***Camellia sasanqua***: There are lots of beautiful varieties of this early camellia, and a favorite of mine is 'Yuletide'.
- ***Sarcococca***: also called Sweet Box because of its sweet vanilla scented flowers. It's a handsome evergreen shrub that's deer resistant and easy to grow in a shady area.
- **Hellebores!** There are so many to choose from and breeders keep creating new ones. Deer resistant!
- ***Viburnum bodnantense* 'Pink Dawn'**: a large growing upright deciduous shrub with very fragrant pink flowers beginning in December and carrying on into February. Actually, it seems like this viburnum is always blooming!

January:

- ***Daphne odora* 'Aureomarginata'**: If you can overcome the finicky nature of this beauty, you will be rewarded with the most amazingly fragrant flowers imaginable! There are a few newer varieties out there that may not be quite as tricky. Look for 'Zuiko Nishiki' which is not variegated, but the flowers are no less fragrant.
- ***Jasminum nudiflorum***: winter jasmine. Sadly, it's not fragrant, but the yellow flowers are very cheerful in winter. Plus the stems are green even though the leaves have fallen off, giving the illusion of an evergreen plant. Use it as a

ground cover, allow it to cascade over a wall, or train it up a trellis the same as you would a climbing rose.

- **Hellebores** - still!
- **Sarcococca** - still! I love these winter super troopers!

February:

- ***Daphne mezereum***: February Daphne. This easy to grow deciduous daphne has very fragrant purple flowers followed by red berries in summer. There is a white flowering version (*Daphne mezereum* 'Alba') that is a little harder to find, but it's worth the effort.
- Witch hazel: I love the yellow flowered varieties because I think they show up better in the landscape. Plus, they seem to be more fragrant than other colors.
- ***Garrya elliptica***: Silk Tassel Bush. *Garrya* has a very unusual flower! It's an 8-10 inch long silvery gray slightly fuzzy tassel that turns yellowish as the pollen is released. This easy shrub is evergreen and grows to about 8-10 feet tall.
- ***Stachyrurus praecox***: Say that 3 times fast! This large deciduous shrub bears pendulous chains of primrose yellow flowers along burgundy stems. It also gets beautiful fall color.
- **Snowdrops**: Hooray! Spring isn't far off!
- ***Camellia x williamsii* 'Donation'**: Beautiful, large, bubblegum pink flowers!
- **Early *Narcissus***: No really! Spring is coming!
- **Hellebores**: Yes, they're still going!

March:

- ***Corylus avellana* 'Contorta'**: Contorted filbert. Not only is this plant structurally stunning, it also blooms in the winter!
- ***Forsythia spp.***: love it or hate it, this yellow flowered shrub is pure cheer come March. There are several newer varieties that don't get quite as large as some of the old stand-bys if space is a concern.
- ***Camellia japonica***: There are so many to choose from!
- ***Corylopsis pauciflora***: Buttercup winter hazel has creamy yellow 1 inch flowers that dangle from bare branches.
- All kinds of ***Narcissus***!
- ***Iris reticulata***: This diminutive iris can bloom as early as February depending on the weather. Buy it as bulbs in the fall or potted in the spring.
- ***Cornus mas***: A yellow flowering dog wood that really doesn't look like a dog wood at all! It blooms on bare branches then forms red cherry-like fruit in the summer, hence the name Cornelian Cherry. Yes, it's edible.