

Winter Interest

We strongly believe that gardens should be interesting all year round. In winter the less obvious glories of flowers and leaves are largely absent but there's still plenty to draw on – bark, plant shape, the last of the berries, a trees and shrubs that do flower in winter and buds which hold the promise of the spring to come. Conifers and evergreen shrubs come into their own in winter as for much of the rest of the year they form a backdrop to other plants – we haven't talked to much about these, just listed a few of our favourites.

Deciduous Trees and Shrubs for Bark

About 20 species of *Acer* whose trunks are patterned with vertical dark green, brownish green, or reddish stripes are known as the Snakebark Maples. We particularly like *Acer capillipes* with its crimson bark, *A. conspicuum* 'Phoenix' and *A. conspicuum* 'Red Flamingo' with their vivid red bark and *A. davidii* with its green and green-grey bark.

Acer griseum, the Paperbark Maple has glossy, chestnut-coloured bark which peels gently back as the plant grows – it's a slowly growing small tree and ideal for the smaller garden.

Acer palmatum 'Sango Kaku', the Coral Bark Maple shows its coral-coloured stems to best effect in winter and is particularly lovely back-lit by the sun.

The white stems of the Birches are seen to best advantage in winter. We enjoy *Betula pendula* – the Silver Birch – because its smallest branches and twigs move, even on the stillest day. For a pure white stem, we like *Betula utilis* 'Jacquemontii'.

Several of the Dogwoods have excellent stem colour. Our favourites are the vivid red stems of *Cornus alba* 'Red Selection' and the orange-pink flame colours of *Cornus alba* 'Midwinter Fire'. Cheerful anywhere, they are truly magnificent when reflected in water.

Prunus serrula – a white flowering Cherry with chestnut-coloured bark

Deciduous Trees and Shrubs for Shape

Without their leaves the contorted trees come into their own. *Corylus avellana* 'Contorta', the Twisted Hazel and *Corylus avellana* 'Contorta Pendula', the Weeping Twisted Hazel and *Salix matsudana* 'Tortuosa' a twisted Willow with good stem colour are our favourites. The Hazels also produce catkins very early in the year.

Many of the *Acer palmatum* varieties and *A. palmatum dissectum* varieties have a good shape which can be clearly seen in the winter.

Deciduous Trees and Shrubs for Berries

Sorbus cashmiriana – the Kashmir Rowan is a beautiful Rowan, ideal for a smaller garden, whose pinky-white berries hang on well into the winter as they're a bit too large for birds to eat. Most of the other Rowans are stripped quite early in the winter. Prefers neutral to acid soil.

Malus 'Red Sentinel' is a Crab Apple we find holds its small, round, red fruits well into winter. Prefers neutral to alkaline soil and is happy on clay.;

The little, spherical, purple berries *Callicarpa bodinieri* 'Profusion' can persist well into winter in milder years when birds have more abundant food supplies.

Trees and Shrubs for Buds

The pussy willow flowers of *Salix caprea* 'Pendula' – the Kilmarnock Willow – burst from their buds early in the spring before the leaves appear.

The furry buds of the deciduous Magnolias get ever plumper, promising the glories to come. We offer a range of Magnolias, both as bushes and as standards. All except the unfussy *M. stellata* prefer neutral to acid soil.

The white felted buds of the *Edgeworthia chrysantha* slowly swell and lift before bursting into headily fragrant yellow flowers in very early spring

In sheltered locations the yellow buds of the Mimosa – *Acacia dealbata* – have been slowly expanding for what seems like months in anticipation of sufficient warmth to flower.

Camellia japonica – the large buds hold so much promise that anticipation is unavoidable!

Deciduous Trees and Shrubs for Flowers and Fragrance

The Witch Hazels – are plants with a long period of interest, flowering on bare stems over winter and in autumn vivid reds and yellows appearing together on the large leaves before leaf-fall. We particularly like the upright habit and golden flowers of *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Arnold Promise'.

Prunus x subhirtilla 'Autumnalis', which is white-flowered and *Prunus x subhirtilla* 'Autumnalis Rosea' which has pale pink-flowers are the earliest of the flowering cherries, blooming throughout the winter in less cold periods.

Viburnum x bodnantense 'Dawn' produces honey-fragranced pink flowers from October to March

Evergreen Shrubs for Flowers and Fragrance

Camellia sasquana – the autumn-flowering Camellia may produce a smaller, less showy flower than the spring-flowering variety, but it makes up for this in the abundance and length of its flowering at a time of year (mid-autumn to mid-winter) when flowering shrubs are in short supply. Its flowers are also less likely to be damaged by frost than those of the spring-flowering *C. japonica*.

Mahonia x media 'Charity' produces long, cheerful, yellow spikes of flowers throughout the winter. Lightly fragrant on sunny days.

Pieris japonica – amongst the large Pieris we like *P. 'Mountain Fire'*, with its brilliant red young foliage, but our real favourite is *P. 'Debutante'*, which makes a compact bush growing to 1m plus, producing its white flowers over a long period

The Sarcococcas – the Christmas Boxes – produce tiny, insignificant highly fragrant flowers in winter – we love to plant them near doors or along routes that are used frequently even in winter so this bonus can be enjoyed. Do best in shade – in sun their leaves tend to look sickly.

Viburnum tinus and cultivars such as *V. tinus* 'Eve Price' produce pink buds in autumn and compact heads of small white flowers over winter. We offer them as bushes in a range of sizes and trained as standards.

Evergreen Trees and Shrubs for Leaf Interest

Euonymus fortunei 'Emerald Gaiety' – the green and white variegated leaves become tinged with pink in cold weather

Nandina domestica – the Sacred Bamboo – an evergreen whose young leaves are red above the older green ones brings a welcome splash of colour to the winter garden, as does *Leucothoe* 'Scarlatia' which is ideal for containers or the border, growing to 45cm by 45cm, and shows off glossy red and green leaves all year.

Sciadopitys verticillata – Japanese Umbrella Pine - unusual whorls of 'leaves' which are botanically stems – evergreen, but with a brown tinge in winter

Other Evergreen Trees and Shrubs with Winter Interest

Pinus sylvestris globosa is a naturally mophead variety of the native Scots Pine which doesn't grow large, but is a wonderful addition to the garden. We offer it as a quarter standard and as a half standard.

Cupressus sempervirens – the thin, dark-green elegance of the Italian Cypress contrasts beautifully with a snowy or frosty garden

The cold seems to bring the best colour out of blue-leaved conifers – we particularly like *Picea pungens glauca 'Globosa'* and *Abies concolor 'Candicans'*.

The Hollies look wonderful all year but in winter when they have less competition and the low sun reflects on their glossy leaves, they look particularly attractive – in a mild winter the berries can persist well into the new year. Our favourite is *Ilex aquifolium 'Argenteomarginata'*, with a creamy margin to each leaf, which we offer as shrubs of various sizes and as half-standard mopheads.

Buxus sempervirens – the dark green of Box topiary looks dramatic against snow and on frosty morning each leaf is rimed with frost.

Ilex crenata 'Kinme' when trained as a Cloud Tree is perhaps the ultimate in horticultural sculpture. Incredibly hardy, they look magnificent when a coating of snow lies on each dark foliage 'cloud'.