

Your garden in January – the winter garden

Winter does not have to be a dull time in the garden. There are plants which fade into the background for most of the year, but as the days get shorter and colder, come into their own.

Most people think that flowers in the garden are only around in spring and summer. There are, in fact, many trees and shrubs, which flower in winter. These flowers are certainly not large and showy, for if they were, the winter winds and frosts would soon see them off. But what they lack in size, they make up for in scent, sending out great wafts of fragrance to attract any pollinating insects still about.

One of my favourites is *Lonicera x purpusii*, a shrubby member of the honeysuckle family. Its tiny cream flowers smell to me exactly like sherbet dabs, those little packets of sherbet with a lolly to dip in! Other great plants for winter fragrance include *Viburnum farreri*, *Sarcococca humilis*, and *Chimonanthus praecox* (known as Winter Sweet). Plant them near a path so you can appreciate the fragrance as you go by.



Viburnum farreri

If fragrance is not enough, then there is a great range of trees and shrubs with colourful bark and stems which glow in the low winter sunshine.

Members of the dogwood family (*Cornus*) have stems in fiery reds, oranges, olive green and even dark purple. The young stems of the coral bark maple (*Acer palmatum* 'Sango Kaku', also known as 'Senkaki') are a beautiful coral pink and look fantastic against the deep blue of a winter sky.

Using strong forms in the garden, like clipped box (*Buxus*) balls or hedging, gives structure to the garden at a time when the rest of the garden is dormant. Covered in the white of a hoar frost, they look magical.

If you want inspiration, there are two excellent winter gardens not too far away. Anglesey Abbey near Cambridge and the Cambridge Botanic Garden demonstrate perfectly that a winter garden is most certainly not dull.