

A Winter Bouquet

MARCH 2000

Before the onset of winter weather, I went out to pick a small bunch of winter flowers and shrubs to liven up my library.

Hellebore niger, the so-called Christmas rose had for the first time in memory lived up to its billing and I had picked one or two earlier. I still have not found the secret to keeping it alive in the house for more than a day or two. I have tried various flower arranger's tricks, boiling water and pins in the stems, but nothing seems to work well. I have found it to like a dose of Epsom Salts in the summer and a little lime every couple of years. I do use a glass cloche over the plants to keep the flower pristine. **Helleborus foetidus** with its very dark fingered foliage will last for weeks and with its tall stems and pale green bells is just as interesting in the garden. I would not be without either one of them.

Three stalwart shrubs will burst into flower if brought in the house for just a few days in February. **Lonicera fragrantissima**, the winter honeysuckle has a lovely lemony smell. It makes a rather straggly bush or as I grow it, climber, but it works well as a host to a Clematis. **Viburnum x bodnantense 'Dawn'** is another winter bloomer that can be cut all winter long. The flowers are pale pink and have a light fragrance. It too makes an ungainly small tree and prefers a sheltered spot. **Skimmia japonica** is an evergreen that I think is underused, it has both buds and berries all winter long and in a sheltered shady spot should thrive. Tucking small early bulbs under its foliage protects little early snowdrops, aconites, cyclamen, and **Crocus tommasianus**, the only crocus that does not get eaten by chipmunks. The cover of the corm is tougher than other varieties.

Joan Sargent, a longtime member and master gardener who passed away in August 2012; wrote about 24 gardening columns for NCBL through the years for our newsletter. We are reprinting them again.

From top, clockwise:

Helleborus niger- the Christmas Rose;
Helleborus foetidus with its lime green flowers;
Lonicera fragrantissima, the winter honeysuckle ;
Viburnum x bodnantense 'Dawn' is another winter bloomer;
Skimmia japonica, an overlooked evergreen gem.

