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. Helleborous 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, bit it works well as a host to a Clematis. Viburnam 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 tommasaninus, 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;
Viburnam x bodnantense ‘Dawn’ is another winter bloomer;
Skimmia japonica, an overlooked evergreen gem.