



Cambridge University Botanical Gardens, England

# WINTER GARDENS

WHILE SUMMER AND AUTUMN MAY BE BEHIND US THERE CAN STILL BE PLENTY TO ADMIRE IN A WINTER GARDEN

WINTER FOR MOST OF US IS A TIME FOR STAYING INDOORS and relishing the warmth of the fire; as the temperature drops, so does the desire to be outdoors in the garden.

Your garden in winter does not need to be dreary and bare. Although a winter garden lacks the joy of flowers that spring can bring and the lush abundance of summertime foliage, there is still a wide choice of flowering trees, shrubs and winter annuals which can bring some life into your garden. With some careful planning it is possible to create a winter garden that provides colour and interest during the cold season.

Add some instant colour where the summer perennials have gone dormant. Winter annuals such as Polyanthus, Primulas and Pansies give the garden an instant lift. Pansies come in all colours and sizes of flowers, so you can plan your winter colour schemes. For a quick fix, create a colourful entrance area using Polyanthus or try white Primulas with their dainty open flowers. They look stunning en masse during winter. Plant in drifts under trees or as a soft filler

behind crisp clipped formal hedging. Remember to plant annual seedlings while the soil is still warm.

While inside on those cold rainy days, when the long hazy days of summer seem like a million miles away, start dreaming and planning how you want your garden to look not just in summer but all year round. Put some ideas down on paper or commission a professional landscape designer to create a plan for you. After the plan is complete, the structure and layout of the garden can be built in late winter. Start planting in early spring, then sit back and reap the rewards.

For successful results, trees are best planted during the months of April through to September/October. This gives roots a chance to get established before the stress of hot summer days. Trees will add beauty and year round structure to your garden. Deciduous trees will offer shade in the summer and let in valuable sun during winter. On a cool crisp day the delicate bare skeletal form of a tree can create an amazing silhouette against clear blue skies. The

bark of a tree can also create some excitement in a winter garden. Try planting trees such as the Paperbark Maple or a Birch tree, on which the bark peels to produce colorful displays on their trunks. Evergreen trees add texture with their variation of leaf shapes and interesting forms.

Early blooming *Magnolia denudata* provides valuable additional colour in the late winter. It is susceptible to frost so is better suited to a more temperate climate. The winter flowering cherry *Prunus subhirtella autumnalis 'Rosea'* has delicate shell pink blooms. This beautiful small tree puts on a gorgeous display and is particularly suited to woodland areas.

Up in the north where winters are milder, there are a range of subtropical plants which give the garden plenty of colour, such as bromeliads with their strappy foliage in various bright colours. Tall majestic palms provide a lush evergreen backdrop for other mixed tropicals.

And finally, you just can't beat old-time classic favourites such as Camellias, Daphne and Hellebores (Winter rose). They provide structure and fragrance in a winter garden. Camellia sasanquas are also suitable for espalier and hedging. They come in various shades of pink, white and red. Daphne has a perfume that will fill and sweeten the chilly air, so plant near the entrance or an outdoor seating area. Hellebores are an evergreen perennial that looks great massed underneath trees. However, they also do well out in the full sun and will produce a wonderful display of flowers.

Plants offer a unique beauty within the winter garden, and adding garden accessories such as benches, arbors, water features, urns, statues and other ornamental objects will create further lasting interest.

A garden can look lifeless in winter, but with careful thought and selection of trees and shrubs, it can easily maintain interest throughout the year. ■



As the frosts set in Cambridge Universities spectacular Winter Garden in England comes into its own, with a fantastic display of coloured stems and leaves, textured tree trunks and the heady scent of winter flowers. A specially designed Winter walk takes you on a tour of the Garden's other Winter botanical delights including a visit to the tropics to warm up in the newly restored Glasshouses. It is a perfect antidote to the drabness of Winter.

Take time this winter to visit local botanic gardens to find inspiration for your garden at home.



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