

# EVERGREEN PERENNIALS

## Hellebores – The Winter Jewels

Hellebores are outstanding perennials for PNW gardens that offer beautiful flower power over the dreary winter months. There are numerous species and cultivars to consider, boasting single or double flowers in a rainbow of colors. These hardy plants have sturdy evergreen foliage and bloom from November to April, depending on the variety you select. All Hellebores are drought tolerant, once established, and they enjoy shade or part shade locations. In some cases, they can also take more sun than you think! Hellebores are often called “Christmas Rose” or “Lenten Rose” – perfect terms for these sweet little holiday bloomers.

There are a few main species we utilize for the PNW and a number of cultivars in different series. Many are also developed as crosses between the different species. There are literally hundreds of named varieties out there and certainly a flower to catch any gardener’s fancy.

- **Hellebores niger** (*Christmas Rose*): Typical fall to winter bloomers in various colors
- **Hellebores orientalis** (*Lenten Rose*): Typical winter to spring bloomers in various colors
- **Hellebores foetidus** (*Stinking Hellebore*): Bigger growers in the 3 foot tall range
- **Hellebores argutifolius** (*Corsican Hellebore*): ‘Pacific Frost’ has striking silver/white foliage
- **North Star Collection:** Lots of cool single and double flowering varieties, in many colors. Look for ‘Chrystalline’, ‘Garnet Frills’, ‘Plum’, ‘Pink’, ‘Ruby Heart’ and others
- **Ice N Roses Series:** Lots to choose from here including ‘Brunello’, ‘Carlotta’, ‘Dark Picotee’, ‘Frosted Rose’, ‘Merlot’, ‘Nightengale’, ‘Picotee’, ‘Red’, ‘Rosato’, ‘Rose’, ‘Rosetta’, ‘White’ and others. Many of these have cool foliage as well as abundant flowers each season
- **Gold Collection:** ‘Pink Frost’, ‘Cinnamon Snow’, ‘Ivory Prince’, ‘Jacob’, ‘Monte Christo’, ‘Crystal Leaf’, ‘Love Bug’, ‘Marlon’, ‘Snow Fever’ and others. Heavy bloomers and also great for pots
- **Frost Kiss Collection:** ‘Penny’s Pink’, ‘Pippa’s Purple’, ‘Anna’s Red’, ‘Bayli’s Blush’, ‘Cheryl’s Shine’, ‘Dorothy’s Dawn’, ‘Molly’s White’, others – most have cool reticulated foliage as well and are extra heavy bloomers each year

## Hellebore Maintenance Schedule

**Fertilizing:** Applying a good organic fertilizer, like E.B. Stone Organic’s Rose/Flower Food, is perfect – twice a year should be plenty, if the plant is healthy. February and May would be ideal timing. If plant is struggling for any reason add a third dose in July.

**Division/transplanting existing plants:** Hellebores are easy to transplant and/or divide. Try to do this during dormant season before they bloom - this could be anytime between November through March, depending on your particular variety. Large mature clumps can easily be split into multiple specimens with a good sharp shovel, like the Rootslayer tool.

**Pruning:** Remove foliage on most varieties as they start to bloom, especially with species orientalis and niger, and crosses of these. By removing old foliage, you expose the fresh blooms and allow them to start over once a season. Corsican or Stinking Hellebores should be cut back, if needed, after flowering in late spring and allowed to rejuvenate over summer. All these types can be monitored during growing season in case of a leaf here or there needs to be removed. Once flowers are spent in the spring, deadhead them by removing the stalks at the base. If you leave them on there, flowers will mature, dry and drop some seeds if you want them to naturalize and multiply.

**Planting new specimens:** Hellebores can be planted year 'round in the PNW. Always dig a nice hole and amend it with 1/3 compost mixed with your native soil, also add some Sure Start organic fertilizer from E.B. Stone Organic's to help roots establish. Be sure that you have adequate drainage as Hellebores do not like heavy clay or poor draining locations. Adding some mulch around new plants will always help with first year watering needs as well. Be careful not to plant them too deep – buried crowns will cause decline.

## Bugs/Diseases

**Bugs:** Watch for aphids, whiteflies and the like hanging out underneath the foliage, especially over winter. They can easily be treated with Insecticidal Soap, Neem Oil or a number of natural cures. I would always recommend removing the old foliage (see pruning above), which not only removes the bug infestation but allows for fresh foliage for the season.

**Diseases:** The one to watch for around here, in our wet weather, is Hellebore Blight - black spotting on leaves and perhaps stems that shrivel and turn black as well. If your plants are diagnosed with the blight, they need to be treated with a good fungicide immediately, like copper or Fungonil. Spraying the foliage, and sometimes soaking the crown of the plant, will help. Always remove foliage and stems immediately that show signs of disease and then spray what is left to control.

## Growing Hellebores in Pots

They make wonderful additions to container gardens located in shade/part shade. With evergreen foliage they look good all year and with blooms in the fall/winter/early spring they provide that pop of color that is much needed that time of the year. Look at foliage as well – many varieties have nice variegation or reticulated leaves for added interest. Hellebores can be enjoyed in pots for a number of seasons and then added to the landscape for even more years of enjoyment.

## Growing Hellebores in the Landscape

Plant your Hellebores in a site that gets morning sun/afternoon shade for the most part, but again many can take more sun than that. Think woodland garden and try massing them – groupings of multiple plants make a statement versus one here and one there kind of thing. Try planting multiple varieties here and there in the garden with staggered bloom times – you could feasibly have plants in color from November through April! Remember that they are drought tolerant, once established – they make excellent additions to drier shade gardens underneath established trees. They always form nice tidy clumps with minimal height.

## Heucheras... Heuchera-itis

All Heuchera (or some call them Coral Bells) are excellent choices for winter color in our Western Washington climate. There is a Heuchera to suit any gardener's taste, as well as one for any spot in the garden, and they are one of THE best plants to add to winter containers for striking foliage. Here are some basics...

- These are all about foliage color and texture – you can find them in any shade ranging from limey green to almost black.
- They bloom spring through fall and some even have brighter flowers too. Look at your bloom choices – the Hummingbirds love them all! Remove spent stalks to keep them blooming throughout the season with fresh color.
- Read their tags for sun location info – most all perform well in varied spots but some prefer more sun, others more shade.
- All show excellent drought tolerance in the garden, once established.

- They are tidy, low clumping growers - perfect for borders in the garden, especially when massed together.
- Easy to clean up, we recommend removing any tired foliage at least once in late summer (means a nice fresh look for fall/winter) and once coming out of winter (means a fresh look for spring/summer).
- Easy to divide/transplant anytime, but especially easy in spring and fall when cleaning them up. One plant will develop into multiple crowns in no time. Dividing them every 2 to 3 years will really give them new life and allow you to share some extras with gardening friends.
- There are new varieties every year - often available in both quart and gallon size plants.
- Look at all of your options, but be careful as you may get “Heuchera-itis” – the addiction to all things Heuchera!

## **Epimediums – Bishops Hat**

Epimediums of all kinds are extremely cool and useful for shadier gardens. They have nice crisp foliage all year, changing to reds over winter but looking good throughout the dormant season. These are clumping plants that slowly spread to almost resemble a groundcover, with just a little bit of height. Spring foliage is often bright and mottled with red on green as well.

- Look at your options of species, and then cultivars in that specie – lots of flower options around.
- These bloom in late winter/early spring – often yellow, pink or orange, for added interest.
- Super drought tolerant and easy to grow in dry shade (under trees/back corners) – makes great filler plant when grouped in mass. Think woodland garden for sure.
- Easy to cut back in February if you want to – snip all the foliage stems to the ground before they bloom, that way you see the flowers more and then get a fresh look in spring.
- Easy to divide and transplant over the winter months.
- Use an organic rose and flower food from EB Stone Organics, if needed, coming out of winter.
- Just a few to check out... Epimedium rubrum, Epimedium sulphureum, Epimedium frohnleiten, Epimedium ‘Lilafee’

## **Bergenia – Pigsqueak**

These bold perennials sport thick, glossy foliage that is large and a lovely green during growing season – they then turn to shades of red/burgundy over winter. They get lovely white or various shades of pink flowers in spring, as added bonus. These grow best in partial shade (morning sun) and will tolerate full shade as well. They form a low spreading groundcover look in the garden, spreading by rhizomes, but with large leaves and are easy to grow.

- They will bloom longer if deadheaded regularly in spring to early summer.
- They will keep their color through the winter, the spring is when you would cut back/clean up old tired foliage, if any is present. We would have to get a brutal winter for them to go dormant.
- They should be planted in mass in the garden, or added individually to containers to winter interest.
- Some good old classics still are useful, other newer hybrids are even lower and tighter growing as well. Look at your options here at the nursery. Even cool variegated ones, like ‘Tubby Andrews’ and ‘Solar Flare’ are available, if you watch for them.
- Use an organic rose/flower food from EB Stone Organics in March and again in June as needed.
- Easy to divide or transplant during dormant months in the garden, or from container to garden.

## **Lavender and Rosemary**

Evergreen herbs, like Lavender and Rosemary, are great for winter interest. Both of these offer greyish-green foliage for contrast against other plants and also have a pleasing fragrance on their foliage. These both love full sun, need drainage and are extremely drought tolerant in the garden. Keep in mind that there are many types of lavender out there to choose from – usually classified as a cultivar of either Spanish, French or English. Spanish ones are more sensitive to cold and our wet winters and they really need perfect drainage. English and French (and hybrids) tend to do much better in our climate. Rosemary will differ a bit in growth habit. They are available in prostrate form (low and spreading) or upright forms (larger and bushy). Lots of options are available to choose from for both!

- Be sure drainage is optimum and plants are in full sun, for either of these.
- Deadhead them after bloom, especially lavender, as most will repeat bloom through the season. It is essential to cut these back coming out of winter to keep low, bushy and tidy plants – unless woody lavender is your thing.
- Rosemary blooms in late winter in shades of blue/lavender mainly – prune these back after they flower to rejuvenate them. These are a little more cold sensitive and some may show tip damage after a nippy winter. They will usually bounce right back though once the weather warms.
- Feed these coming out of winter as needed, maybe once more in June – use an organic granular rose/flower food from EB Stone Organics.
- Easy to transplant anytime during the winter, if needed.

## **Euphorbia – Spurge**

Euphorbias are available in a number of different colors and blooms these days. They are extremely drought tolerant for full sun and well-drained gardens. They will go to seed if not deadheaded after bloom and naturalize, giving you some fresh seedlings each season as they get established. They also look fabulous in winter containers for their structure and foliage colors.

- Check your tags for bloom times and ultimate size. Most bloom coming out of winter.
- Huge array of foliage colors, from variegated forms to reds to purples to blues, or nice green as well.
- Cut back once blooms are spent, in order to rejuvenate.
- Be sure to wear gloves as they have a sticky white sap when cut and folks that are prone to rashes/allergic should be extra careful.
- A few of our favs to look for, ‘Rudolph’, ‘Glacier Blue’, ‘Ascot Rainbow’, or ‘Merlot’

## **Saxifraga - Rockfoils**

These will offer you a huge array of choices! Always check tags for habits/locations/blooms, but most love some sun and good drainage. These are short and will slowly form almost a groundcover with time. Perfect along low borders, in rockeries, and even in containers as accents. They will bloom as well, typically in either spring or summer, sometimes both. This is another plant where a few or a mass will make a nice statement. Here are a few of our favorites...

- ‘London Pride’ is an excellent variegated selection with large airy flowers perfect for part sun to shade. Yellow splashes on green foliage. Short and tidy.
- Touran Series has a few colors (red, pink, white) and are excellent bloomers starting in March and going into mid-summer. Short and tidy clumps, perfect for a sunnier border or rockery.
- ‘Maroon Beauty’ is sometimes called the strawberry saxifrage – it has cool reds and silvers on foliage and forms a nice mat with stunning foliage. Best in part shade or shade, large airy blooms in spring as well.

## Evergreen Grasses

There are some sweet choices for evergreen grasses, for both the garden and winter containers. Most of these have a short, mounding growth habit and provide texture, color and some motion to the winter garden. They are suited to most spots in the landscape and are very low maintenance.

- Explore some of the options for sedges (*Carex* sp.). These are great for color and available in a number of options. From 'Orange Sedge' (*C. testacea*) to 'Frosty Curls' (white/green) to all the new 'Evercolor Series', there is one that will catch your eye for sure.
- Look a Mondo Grass (including black) and Lily Turf (*Liriope*), as other grassy options with color and flower. Even Mexican Feather Grass, if you like the short little blonde hair!
- These are easy to divide and transplant down the road in dormant months.
- If you are going to prune these, do so coming out of winter (like early April) and cut them down to 3" to 4" above the ground, allowing it to start over again. Cutting brown tips off will only make worse.
- If you feed them, do so in April and again in June. Happy soil equals happy grass. I doubt you will need to feed them much, but be sure to do so if you cut back or move them.
- They do get cute little seedy flowers on them too.
- Be sure to check tags for heights, spreads and sun exposure.

## Evergreen Ferns

Ferns love shade/partial shade, and evergreen ones are useful additions to landscapes and winter containers. They provide some nice structure and wonderful texture to these areas. Ferns add that pre-historic look the garden, almost like they have been in that spot for millennia. Look at the various options, and check your tags for specific sizes and habits. Typically these types of ferns should be left alone until spring, then they can be cut back to start anew, if needed, once the little fiddleheads are emerging. Be careful to cut these off – don't wait too long, until old is mixed with new. Plant a mass of them to make a statement. Here are a few of our evergreen faves around here...

- Sword Fern: A PNW native that is durable and easy. Bigger and bushier than most and will take some sun as well. (*Polystichum munitum*)
- Deer Fern: Another PNW native that is daintier, but still striking. Blackish stems and bright green fronds that are narrow and arching. Grows to about 18" tall and wide. A variety I cut back every spring in my own garden. (*Blechnum spicant*)
- Autumn Fern: The perfect fall/winter fern with bold orangey-red color on new growth and nice structure. 'Brilliance' is the superior cultivar these days. (*Dryopteris ethyrosora*)
- Tassel Fern: A sweet fern with nice color, habit and structure over the winter. Cinnamon colored stems and fiddleheads add more interest, especially come spring. (*Polystichum polyblepharum*)
- Hardy Alaskan Fern: Cool little native from up north, so you know it is super hardy. Short look, almost like a groundcover and interesting kind of spiral-like growth habit. (*Polystichum setiferum*)

**These are just some of the evergreen perennials available that you can choose from, there are even more options out there to explore!**