

Garden design solutions: 5 flowering shrubs for late winter interest



By Ian McBain

Last autumn, I wrote about a few of my favourite evergreen shrubs, and this month I want to continue on that theme but with a focus on those that flower in late winter. February can

be a tricky month- we are tantalisingly close to the beginning of spring, but we've still got the long dark nights and cold temperatures of winter. Perhaps being the shortest month of the year isn't too bad a thing?

Our gardens can still be a source of pleasure though, and here are five brilliant shrubs to brighten up any late winter garden:

1. Sarcococca 'Winter Gem': a compact evergreen shrub with glossy dark green leaves and tassel-like creamy white flowers. Strongly scented and guaranteed to prompt a smile on a crisp winter's day. Best in full or part shade, this a useful evergreen shrub for a tricky corner of a garden.

2. Camellia 'Donation' (pictured): a large robust evergreen shrub with beautiful large pink flowers. Providing colour and cheer from late winter to early spring, this is a lovely plant for a mixed planting scheme. Camellias tend to dislike very alkaline soils, and are best planted away from early morning sunshine (which can scorch the flowers on colder mornings).

3. Mahonia 'Charity': one of my absolute favourite evergreen shrubs, Mahonias give us textural interest throughout the year and spikes of gloriously bright and cheerful golden yellow flowers throughout the winter months. Happy in full sun or partial shade, this is a large and attractive evergreen star.

4. Skimmia 'Rubella': a slow-growing evergreen shrub perfect for winter interest. Bushy in form, and with dark-green, slightly glossy leaves, this is a fairly anonymous plant for much of the year.



It comes to the fore in late winter when clusters of bright red buds develop, later opening into perfumed white flowers in early-spring. Preferring full or partial shade, and acidic to neutral soils, Skimmia 'Rubella' are a great choice for a smaller garden or a large container.

5. Viburnum 'Dawn': OK, this one is a bit of a cheat because it isn't evergreen! Viburnum 'Dawn' is, however, one of my 'must have' winter plants because it flowers on bare stems. With abundant clusters of wonderfully attractive and delicately scented pink/white blooms, this is a great upright and vigorous shrub for the middle or back of a mixed planting scheme.

In a few months we will be surrounded by an abundance of spring and summer colour, but few plants can provide as much delight as those which choose to perform in late winter.

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