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Gina Smith |







THE GREENHOUSE

Westminster Abbey's Monthly Garden Newsletter

Jan
2001



WILLOW



HAWTHORN



SYCAMORE



BEECH



POPLAR



OAK



ELM

This Month

Snow already and January hadn't even started! The College Gardens looked very pretty covered in snow, and the fountain in Little Cloister even produced icicles. I couldn't help thinking of the poor monks who used to live here in the days before central heating. Still, perhaps they had a glass or two of wine to keep them warm. (How do you think we manage in our uncentrally heated greenhouse?)

Gardening Tasks

At this time of year there's not much practical that can be done in the garden. However it is a good time to look at the structure of your garden to see if there is enough going on in winter.

It's easy to forget when you are in the Garden Centre in June that those gorgeous geraniums will vanish in winter. Most gardens need more evergreens, especially around the edges. Try *Pyracantha*, *Pittosporum*, *Chaenomeles*, *Elaeagnus x ebbingei*, *Garrya elliptica*, *Olearia*, *Azara*, *Hebe*, *Osmanthus*, and see the scented plant list.



Hellebores

Hellebores *viridis* and *foetidus* are native plants, though very rare in the wild. They are easy to grow in shady spots, but are poisonous. At one time people would eat parts of the plant to rid themselves of worms. Unfortunately the effects often did for the patients as well.

Seductive Scents

The depths of winter are not really the time to be smooching about in the shrubbery. There are however a few plants with sweetly scented flowers just now. Those that spring to mind are: *Daphne mezereum*, *Mahonia x media*, *Sarcococca hookeriana*, *Lonicera x purpusii*, *Chimonanthus praecox*, *Acacia dealbata*.

Winter Trees

When the trees are bare you can enjoy their different shapes and ways of growing. The long straight shoots of the Willow could not be mistaken for the bedraggled growth of a Hawthorn for example. Elm *Ulmus* trees provided a distinctive silhouette in the English countryside until they were badly affected by Dutch Elm disease in the 70s.

One unusual feature you can spot now is 'witches brooms'. These really look like tiny besoms stuck up in the branches of trees - often Birches or Hornbeams. The condition is caused by a fungus which doesn't harm the tree.



Herbal Remedies

An area of wild plants has always existed in the College Gardens. The monks used many of the plants as medicine. Comfrey *Symphytum* was applied as a poultice to bruises, sprains and broken bones.



