



VIBURNUM X BODNANTENSE
'CHARLES LAMONT'

In winter this viburnum produces blooms of fragrant pink flowers that over time fade to a lighter tint. It is far lovelier than the better known *V. x bodnantense* 'Dawn', and just a few branches will fill your home with a sweet-smelling scent. To maintain strong and beautiful productive growth it's important you prune after flowering but do so very carefully; at the most remove just a few old branches. AGM*.

Height 2.5m.

Origin Taken from a seedling raised at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, in 1933.

Conditions Moderately fertile, humus-rich soil; full sun to full shade.

Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 6a-9b†.

Season Winter to early spring.



Fleur van Zonneveld
runs the Dutch nursery
De Kleine Plantage.
dekleineplantage.nl

FEBRUARY PLANTS

In the first of a new series, nurserywoman Fleur van Zonneveld selects her favourite February plants, from fragrant blooms to delicate harbingers of spring

WORDS FLEUR VAN ZONNEVELD PHOTOGRAPHS MAAYKE DE RIDDER



CYCLAMEN COUM F.
PALLIDUM 'ALBUM'

Weather permitting, this cyclamen can bloom in January or even earlier. What's lovely is that it is so variable. The heart-shaped, glossy leaves are often attractively mottled and, occasionally, marbled with silver. The flowers are reminiscent of little butterflies, and since we love having butterflies in the garden, *Cyclamen coum* is a good substitute in cold weather. A perfect tuberous perennial for naturalising between shrubs and trees. It easily self-seeds. AGM.

Height 10cm.

Origin Caucasus.

Conditions Well-drained, humus-rich soil; part shade.

Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 5a-9b.

Season Early spring.



PRIMULA VULGARIS

One of our favourite plants for early spring is the pale-yellow *Primula vulgaris*. It flowers exuberantly, directly from the leaf axils on short individual stems and will self-seed widely (the seeds are also scattered by ants). Combine it with *Primula elatior* and *Primula veris*, especially interesting cultivars such as 'Sunset Shades', and you will be rewarded with an overwhelming flood of yellow, sometimes with a reddish orange or green touch that sings of spring. The blue accent of *Scilla bifolia* in between makes the show complete. AGM.

Height 10cm.

Origin Western and southern Europe.

Conditions Moist but well-drained soil; part shade to full sun.

Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 4a-8b.

Season Early spring.

LEUCOJUM VERNUM

For the past few years a virulent snowdrop epidemic has been sweeping the Netherlands. It takes the form of countless snowdrop days, snowdrop markets, snowdrop galas, snowdrop books – even snowdrop cakes. We've remained largely immune – mainly because we prefer *Leucojum vernum* to any *Galanthus*. They are larger and more striking with green dots on the petals, and always arrive sooner than you expect. The flowers are a somewhat frivolous creamy-white and crinoline-like. They form carpets under trees and are happy to be planted in the green directly after flowering. AGM.

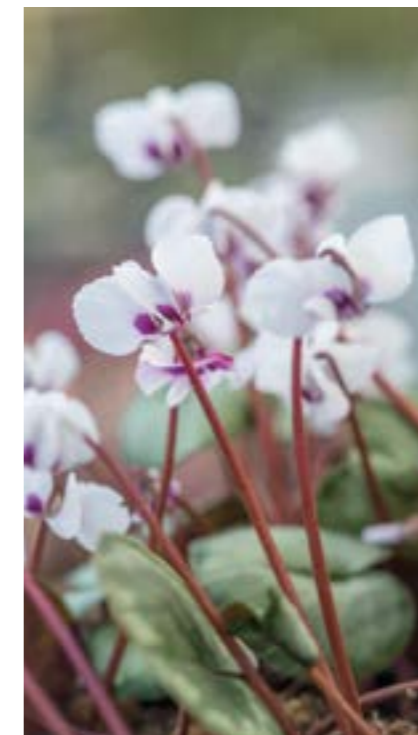
Height 30cm.

Origin Central and eastern Europe.

Conditions Moist but well-drained soil; part shade to full sun.

Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.

Season Spring.





LONICERA X PURPUSII 'WINTER BEAUTY'

Winter can be hard for those of us who love to bring flowers into the house. Thank goodness then for *Lonicera x purpusii* 'Winter Beauty', which is so highly fragrant a single branch can transform your house. In temperate climates the shrubby honeysuckle is semi-evergreen with beautiful, dark-green leaves, and produces dark-red berries in the summer. The rough-textured grey bark on old stems makes it even more appealing. AGM.

Height 2m.

Origin Cross between *L. fragrantissima* and *L. standishii* (1920).

Conditions Moist but well-drained soil; full sun or part shade.

Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 5a-9b.

Season Winter to early spring.



PETASITES ALBUS

The semi-circular dense clusters of this butterbar's yellowish white flowers always remind me of a group of imps standing in a row. Its leaves appear after flowering, and the small fleshy petioles (flower stems) are edible, along with the flower buds, which are delicious when fried. It is a good companion for *Leucojum vernum* and *Primula vulgaris*. Unlike other *Petasites* species, such as *P. japonicus* var. *giganteus* and *P. hybridus*, its growth is slower and more civilised, but in common with others it is attractive to bees, which is important in early spring.

Height 30cm.

Origin Europe, Caucasus, southwest Asia.

Conditions Moist but well-drained soil; part to full shade.

Hardiness RHS H7.

Season Early spring.



HELLEBORUS FOETIDUS

One of the best-known hellebores with clusters of hanging green flowers. It's what in the Netherlands we call a *stinzenplanten* [see places to visit below] – plants that were introduced so long ago we tend to think of them as natives – and when grown among other *stinzenplanten* adds height and stature. From our window we can see this *Helleborus foetidus* all year long and we never tire of it. We also love the selections *Helleborus foetidus* Wester Flisk Group with red stems and flowers edged with dark red, and *Helleborus foetidus* 'Sopron' with silvery leaves.

Height 60cm.

Origin Western and southern Europe.

Conditions Moist but well-drained soil; full sun to part shade.

Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 5a-9b.

Season Early spring.

PLACES TO VISIT

Recommended places to see seasonal plants at their best both in Europe and the UK

In the Netherlands, especially in the northern provinces of Friesland and Groningen, you find a special type of flora, known as *stinzenplanten*, growing around old manor houses (or *stinzen* as they're called in Friesland) and other older country gardens. These are spring plants, mainly, but not exclusively, bulbs and tubers that were imported into the Netherlands from

the 16th century onwards and have naturalised so well we tend to think of them as natives. They're plants we cherish because they belong to our cultural heritage and many of the bulbs and perennials I've chosen this month fall into this category. Gardens and parks that feature these *stinzenplanten* among communities of native plants are protected and restored

and one especially good example is **Stinze Stiens Garden**, in Stiens, Friesland. Once home to the local doctor, its garden was designed by the well-known Dutch designer Gerrit Vlaskamp (1834-1906), who designed many of Friesland and Groningen's parks. The current owners have restored the garden with care and knowledge, and after years of neglect many

of the *stinzenplanten*, including *Crocus tommasinianus* and *Leucojum vernum*, have returned to their former glory. Smelbregte 6, 9051 BH Stiens, the Netherlands. stinze-stiens.nl

One of my favourite nurseries **Kwekerij De Hessenhof**, near Ede in the Netherlands, is a great source of inspiration for spring plants. It's an organic ▷

CHRYSOSPLENIUM MACROPHYLLUM

One of the earliest flowering plants, this has leathery leaves that look a little like *Bergenia*. At our nursery we have planted this evergreen groundcover in an old metal container and it is doing fine. The plant itself makes long runners with new rosettes. These runners are unbelievably tough and virtually impossible to break, with a strong fibre running through them. The plant is extremely easy to propagate and once you have seen it you will love it. When we hold our hellebore days it often attracts more attention than the hellebores themselves.

Height 20cm.

Origin China.

Conditions Well-drained soil.

Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 6a-7a.

Season February to March.



HELLEBORUS X STERNII 'SILVER SHADOW'

Among the slew of new hellebore hybrids and cultivars, all with fabulous colours, flower shapes and leaf structures, 'Silver Shadow' demands a special place. It has extraordinary flowers – a mix of pink, green and apricot colours – that rise wonderfully against the silvery leaves with serrated edges. It is lower and more compact than many other hellebores and does very well in pots. Unlike most other hellebores, it likes a sunny, dry and alkaline soil.

Height 35cm.

Origin Cross between *H. argutifolius* and *H. lividus*.

Conditions Well-drained soil; full sun.

Hardiness RHS H3, USDA 5a-9b.

Season Early spring.



CARDAMINE QUINQUEFOLIA

We love the entire *Cardamine* genus, but *Cardamine quinquefolia*, which spreads quickly to fill a large area, is one of the most beautiful. In our garden it starts blooming in late February, the fresh-green colour of its leaves showing such enthusiasm that for us this has become a plant that epitomises spring. Its delicate flowers are more lilac than purple, and like other cardamines are held above beautiful leaves. It seems fragile, but it is perfectly hardy, and prefers moist soil in partial shade. And best of all it is a magnet for early butterflies.

Height 25cm.

Origin Central and southern Europe.

Conditions Moist soil; full to part shade.

Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 6a-7a.

Season Spring.



▷ nursery owned by Hans and Miranda Kramer, and it is always a pleasure to walk through the planting beds and discover new plants. Hans has introduced plants from all over the world, but he's most famous for his selections of *Helleborus x hybridus*. In February he and Miranda organise hellebore days with highlights from their own selections. Hessenweg 41, 6718 TC Ede,

the Netherlands. Tel +31 (0)318 617334, hessenhof.nl

Under the leadership of Robert and Jelena De Belder, the **Kalmthout Arboretum** in Belgium has become one of the most prestigious botanical collections in the world. It's a great garden to visit and has a huge collection (one of many) of *Hamamelis*. Every winter it hosts a witch hazel festival, which

runs up until the end of February. Heuvel 8, 2920 Kalmthout, Belgium. Tel +32 (0)3 666 6741, arboretumkalmthout.be

Despite my reservations about galanthomania, I will concede that a walk among mass plantings of snowdrops can be one of February's great joys. One of the loveliest snowdrop walks in the UK is at **Colesbourne Park** in the Cotswolds. It was

once home to the Victorian botanist and galanthophile Henry John Elwes (1846-1922) after whom the snowdrop *Galanthus elwesii* was named. His original snowdrop collection has grown into one of the largest in the UK, including more than 250 cultivars, with new ones added each year. Colesbourne Gardens, Colesbourne, nr Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL53 9NP.

Tel 01242 870567, colesbournegardens.org.uk

Not far from Colesbourne Park is **Painswick Rococo Garden**, where you'll find more snowdrops along with *Cyclamen coum* and several hellebores. It's also the only garden from the rococo period open to the public. Painswick Rococo Garden Painswick, Gloucestershire GL6 6TH. Tel 01452 813204, rococogarden.org.uk