

the winter garden

In a well thought-out garden, winter can be a time of great beauty. Colourful stems, early flowering bulbs and architectural evergreens and grasses can provide much needed texture and blazes of colour when the majority of plants are still dormant. A stroll around the Winter Garden at Wakehurst Place can brighten up the dullest of winter days.

The Winter Garden at Wakehurst Place is to the west of the Mansion, and adjacent to the Walled Gardens.

Take the tour

The bed nearest the Mansion features evergreen shrubs and masses of winter-flowering heathers – such as *Erica carnea* 'Vivellii' and *E. carnea* 'Springwood White'. White and pink blooming varieties have been chosen to provide a sequence of flowering that lasts from December through to early March. Yellow-green variegation is a theme of the shrubs in this bed – ranging from such well known evergreens as *Euonymus fortunei* 'Emerald and Gold' to more unusual variegated ivies.

The second bed, to the left, is particularly well placed to benefit from winter sun shining across the Mansion lawns. Here plants have been chosen for the effect of their winter stems in low light – casting dramatic patterns of colour, light and shade. In addition to the strikingly coloured stems of dogwoods (*Cornus* species) and willows (*Salix* species) are grasses such as *Molinia caerulea* 'Variegata'. The warm red stems of *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica' are particularly beautiful on a cold winter's day. You will also be able to find winter-berried shrubs such as *Gaultheria x wisleyensis* and early dwarf narcissi.

One plant that's particularly worth 'sniffing out' is *Sarcococca hookeriana*. The flowers themselves are quite inconspicuous but the scent is wonderful and the plant's compact size makes it a must for the smaller garden. It thrives in sun or shade and the perfume can be enjoyed from mid-December to late January.

Shrubs such as dogwoods and willows, grown for their colourful stems, have to be coppiced or cut down each year because only the young stems are brightly coloured. On each plant four or five stems are left at the initial coppice so that the leaves can flush and begin to provide energy to the plant early in the spring. They are cut back once the new stems take over.

Another striking plant in this part of the Winter Garden is *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Nigra'. It is grown for its beautiful black winter stems but these also provide a splendid contrast to the plant's bright greyish-green summer foliage.

Black and white

The birches in Bed 2 are *Betula utilis* var. *occidentalis* (nearest the Mansion) *Betula utilis* var. *prattii* and *B. nigra*. However, the most beautiful birch in the Winter Garden is the *B. utilis* var. *jacquemontii* planted in the lawn between Beds 2, 3 and 4. In addition to its stark white bark, the tree has been imaginatively under-planted with the black-leaved *Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens', through which the white flowers of snowdrops appear in late January or early February.



*Crocus
tommasinianus*

Kew

PLANTS PEOPLE
POSSIBILITIES

To the left of this area, Bed 5 has been planted with drifts of white-flowering heathers to give the effect of snow. Another heavenly scented plant here is *Daphne bholua*, from the eastern Himalayas. It has one of the most beautiful perfumes of all the daphnes. The same species can also be found growing in the Westwood Valley area of the Gardens and its scent can fill the air even before they are seen.

Berried treasure

A range of skimmias can also be seen in Bed 5 of the Winter Garden. Look out, in particular, for *Skimmia japonica* 'Wakehurst White'. It was found as a chance seedling among the collections at Wakehurst Place in the mid 1990s. It has good potential as a garden plant, especially as there are so few white-berried skimmias and it is a good compact shrub, holding its fruits through the winter. The large almost black-leaved shrub nearby is *Pittosporum tenuifolia* 'Tom Thumb', which is hardy enough to survive Wakehurst Place's winters, where temperatures are normally no lower than -5° Celsius.

From here, walk back towards the Walled Gardens to see the rest of the Winter Garden. In Bed 4 you will find a large group of skimmias (Wakehurst Place holds the National Collection) and some mature plants of *Daphne bholua*. The large wintergreen, on the Walled Gardens side of the bed, is *Drimys lanceolata*, with attractive dark green



aromatic foliage and clusters of large, dark berries – a plant which deserves to be as well-used in gardens as the better known *D. winteri*. The young spring growth has a coppery tint. Nearby is a particularly good garden conifer, *Abies koreana* 'Silberlocke'. It is an attractive, open, conical tree which produces cones while still young. The specimen here is about 2 metres tall after 10 years and the plant will continue to be a relatively slow-grower though eventually making a large forest tree.

One does not normally associate rhododendrons with winter gardens but in Bed 3 you can see the light pink flowers of *Rhododendron x pulcherrimum* in the centre. This large shrub can flower from as early as the first week in November right through until the end of March. Further examples of *Cornus* new to English gardens are underplanted with winter flowering heathers.

Other winter features

Wakehurst Place has plenty more to offer at this time of year. Take Farm Walk, the path heading down the slope away from the Mansion, to enjoy more of the *Skimmia* Collection and then head on towards Bethlehem Wood where there is the National Collection of birches with their tremendous diversity of bark colours and textures. Towards the end of the winter there are drifts of snowdrops in the lawns by the Mansion Pond and Black Pond. Daffodils between the Mansion and the Garden entrance are the first signs of spring.

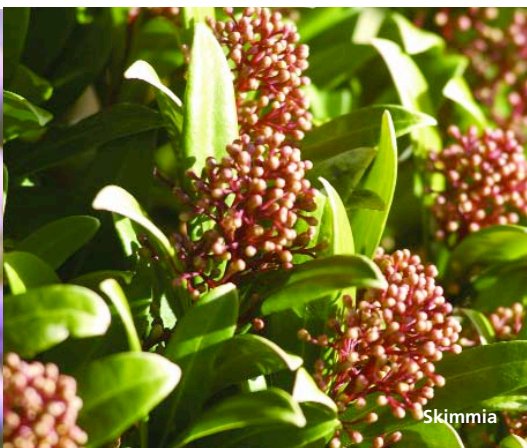
Wakehurst Place, near Ardingly in West Sussex, is Kew's country garden. Open daily from 10am.

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Erica



Skimmia



Daphne