



RUISLIP  
CENTRAL  
HORTICULTURAL  
SOCIETY



# HELLEBORE

**IT is this time of year when all the festivities are over, the days are dark damp and cold, and it's back to work or school and it seems that the garden is the last place to cheer you up. Winter discontent is a strong emotion that beats in the gardener's breast, more powerful even than Midsummer panic (Help, it's all getting out of hand!)**

Well that could all change with a little help from the good old **Hellebore**. (*Helleborus*) The Hellebore comprises of approximately 20 different species, they are perennials or evergreen flowering plants from the *Ranunculaceae* family. The more common name for these plants are *Christmas Rose*, *Lenten Rose* or even *Winter Rose*, however they are not even closely linked to the rose family.

I have a selection in my gravel garden, the gravel really sets them off well, and also is a great medium for the seeds to self-set. I class the Hellebore as the plant that kicks off the year, as it is always just around New Year that I notice the new growth poking through the gravel, and within a few weeks these flowering stems are a foot high.

The flowers are the first growth to show, appearing on the fresh new shoots, if you have not done so already, it is time to cut last year's growth right down to the base on the perennial varieties, (*Orientalis* type) leaving the new growth room, light and space to push its way through. These plants are fantastic in the way that they bounce back from any sudden shock of a cold night, frost and even snow. *Helleborus* have a special way to protect against frost. They extract moisture from the flowers as the cold sets in so they do not freeze. That moisture will be stored in the roots. After the freeze the moisture returns to the flowers.

My pride and joy Hellebore is a double chocolate variety called *Helleborus Niger*, its jet black double flowers with bright white centres really look great against the dark green stems and the combination of the gravel too. The one disappointing thing about hellebores is that they are very shy. Nature had a bad day I feel, as the natural flowering position for the flower heads is facing downwards! You either have to be less than one foot tall, get down on your hands and knees or carry a mirror on a long stick, and yes I have seen this done!

These plants come in a wide variety of colours, ranging from deep dark colours to bright yellows

and even mixed two toned flowers such as white with a blush of pink or red. One of the nicest I've seen recently (however have not got my

hands on yet!) is a fantastic double flowering yellow with speckles of red on each petal. Amazing.

So to soften those feelings of winter discontent, go shopping. A new plant for the garden performs the same trick as a new pair of shoes, or a new tie, so visit a good garden centre or even pay a visit to one of the **Royal Horticultural Society London shows** in Vincent Square near Victoria. RHS London shows are held in the RHS Lindley Hall, SW1P 2QW and RHS Lawrence Hall SW1P 2QD The next one is Friday and Saturday **February 20th & 21st from 10am-5pm.**

## RCHS MAILBAG

**We have had quite a few questions from readers this month. All of which will be answered, however I would like to feature two here.**

**Q I picked up some bulbs on offer recently. Is it too late to plant these and should I keep them for next year instead? Margaret, Ickenham.**

A The worse thing possible for a bulb is to allow it to dry out and shrivel up. This will deem it useless and you may as well throw it away. So any bulb should be planted. You may be rewarded this year, however even if you miss a year of flower, there is always 2016 to look forward to!

**Q I hear that one should mulch the borders. When should this be done and using what? Paul, Eastcote.**

A Spring is coming, and it's time to start thinking about mulching your flower beds for the Summer. Natural mulch is extremely beneficial for a garden. It traps moisture in the soil, so you don't have to water as often, and it acts as an insulator, so your plants' roots don't get too hot. (It has the same effect in the Winter, keeping plants from getting too cold.) And it suppresses weeds, so you don't have to weed as often. So all in all it is a great thing to do. I mulch my garden every two years using a mixture of sterilised mushroom compost and mature horse manure.

**Please email the RCHS on [rchstalks@gmail.com](mailto:rchstalks@gmail.com) with any questions you have, and visit the website too [www.ruisliphorticultural.org.uk](http://www.ruisliphorticultural.org.uk)**

Next month RCHS committee member Margaret Macintosh will be featuring Daffodils.  
Until then.

*Warren*

**Please come and see us at the  
RCHS A.G.M SOCIAL  
on Tuesday 17th February, 7.30pm  
St. Lawrence Church Hall, Bridle Road, Pinner.  
It is free to attend and there will be refreshments.**

