

# Hellebores – The Winter Jewels

Hellebores are outstanding perennials for PNW gardens that offer flowers over the dreary winter months. There are numerous species and cultivars to consider, boasting single or double flowers in a rainbow of colors. These hardy plants have sturdy evergreen foliage and bloom from November to April, depending on the variety you select. All Hellebores are drought tolerant once established and they enjoy shade or part shade locations. In some cases, they can also take more sun than you think! Hellebores are often called “Christmas Rose” or “Lenten Rose” – a perfect term for these sweet holiday bloomers.

There are a few main species we utilize for the PNW and a number of cultivars in different series. Many are also developed as crosses between the different species. There are literally hundreds of named varieties out there and certainly a flower to catch anyone’s fancy.

- **Hellebores niger** (Christmas Rose): Typical fall to winter bloomers in various colors
- **Hellebores orientalis** (Lenten Rose): Typical winter to spring bloomers in various colors
- **Hellebores foetidus** (Stinking Hellebore): Bigger growers in the 3 foot tall range
- **Hellebores argutifolius** (Corsican Hellebore): Pacific Frost has silver/white foliage
- **Winter Jewels Collection:** Lots of cool single and double flowering varieties, in lots of colors
- **Ice N Roses Series:** Picotee, Red, Pink
- **Gold Collection:** ‘Pink Frost’, ‘Cinnamon Snow’, ‘Ivory Prince’, ‘Jacob’, ‘Monte Christo’
- **Frost Kiss Collection:** ‘Penny’s Pink’, ‘Pippa’s Purple’, ‘Anna’s Red’ – cool reticulated foliage
- **New for 2020/2021:** ‘Cheryl’s Shine’, ‘Sally’s Shell’, ‘Glenda’s Gloss’, ‘Honeyhill Joy’

## Year-Long Maintenance Schedule

**Fertilizing:** Applying a good organic fertilizer, like E.B. Stone Organic’s Rose/Flower Food, is perfect – twice a year should be plenty, if the plant is healthy. February and May would be ideal times for applying fertilizer. If plant is struggling, add a third dose in July.

**Division/transplanting existing ones:** Hellebores are easy to transplant and/or divide. Try to do this during dormant season before they bloom - this could be anytime between November and March, depending on your particular variety. Large mature clumps can easily be split into multiple specimens with a good sharp shovel.

**Pruning:** Remove foliage on most varieties as they start to bloom – especially with species orientalis and niger, and crosses of these. By removing old foliage you expose the fresh blooms and allow them to start over once a season. Corsican or Stinking Hellebores should be cut back, if needed, after flowering in late spring and allowed to rejuvenate over summer. All these types can be monitored during growing season incase a leaf here or there needs to be removed. Once flowers are spent in the spring, deadhead them by removing the stalks at the base. If you leave them on there, they will dry and drop some seeds if you want them to naturalize as well.

**Planting new specimens:** Hellebores can be planted year 'round in the PNW. Always dig a nice hole and amend it with 1/3 compost mixed with your native soil, adding some Sure Start organic fertilizer from E.B. Stone Organic's to help roots establish. Be sure that you have adequate drainage as Hellebores do not like heavy clay or poor draining locations. Adding some mulch around new plants will always help with first year watering needs as well.

## **Bugs/Diseases**

**Bugs:** Watch for aphids, whiteflies and the like hanging out underneath the foliage, especially over winter. They can easily be treated with Insecticidal Soap, Neem Oil or a number of natural cures. I would always recommend removing the old foliage (see pruning above), which not only removes the bug infestation but allows for fresh foliage for the season.

**Diseases:** The one to watch for around here in our wet weather is Hellebore Blight - black spotting on leaves and perhaps stems that shrivel and turn black as well. If your plants are diagnosed with the blight, they need to be treated with a good fungicide immediately, like copper or Fungonil. Spraying the foliage, and sometimes soaking the crown of the plant, will help. Always remove foliage and stems immediately that show signs of disease and then spray what is left to control.

## **Growing Hellebores in Pots**

They make wonderful additions to container gardens located in shade/part shade. With evergreen foliage they look good all year and with blooms in the fall/winter/early spring they provide that pop of color that is much needed that time of the year. Look at foliage as well – many varieties have nice variegation or reticulated leaves for added interest. Hellebores can be enjoyed in pots for a number of seasons and then added to the landscape for even more years of enjoyment.

## **Growing Hellebores in the Landscape**

Plant your Hellebores in a site that gets morning sun/afternoon shade for the most part, but again many can take more sun than that. Think woodland garden and try massing them – groupings of multiple plants that make a statement. Try planting multiple varieties here and there in the garden with staggered bloom times – you could feasibly have plants in color from November through April! Remember that they are drought tolerant, once established – they make excellent additions to drier shade gardens underneath established trees. They always form nice tidy clumps.