

We Love December

for its festive red-and-green finery

This month is, like many football matches, a game of two halves. The first half (BC – before Christmas) is a frenzy of anticipation, sparkly lights, shopping, parties and the marshalling of hyper-excitable children. The second part (AC – after Christmas) is mostly spent lolling around in armchairs, regretting that final mince pie and wishing your relatives knew when to go home. The only certainty is that, like a steadfast friend, your garden will be out there just waiting for all the celebrations to subside and will welcome you back, at your leisure, to sort the compost heap.

Words by James Alexander-Sinclair

STAR OF THE MONTH

Cotoneaster amoenus

Cotoneasters are generally unappreciated: they are mainly considered worth their place in the garden as background evergreens, small trees, hedges or as big green blobs grown to block off unwelcome views. They are useful in all those roles but, at this time of year, they come into their own. Clusters of Santa-coloured berries scurry along every branch. When cut they make wonderful wreaths and decorations; left in place they carry a frost with great aplomb and they also provide valuable winter food for many of our garden birds. So, let's all show them some proper *Gardeners' World* love.

An easy shrub – fine in all free-draining soil types and happy in sun or light shade. **Height x Spread** 2.5m x 1.5m



DOGWOOD SUNRISE

I adore a Siberian dogwood: they are, I think, a bit like porcupines rattling their crimson spines at the watery winter light. Behind them looms the *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Tom Thumb': as dark and sultry as a little black storm cloud. The contrast will bring a bit of December zip into your shrubbery.

Cornus alba 'Sibirica'

Will grow in most soil types, in sun or partial shade. Cut back the older, thicker stems in spring as the youngest stems are always the brightest. **H x S** 2.5m x 2.5m

Pittosporum tenuifolium 'Tom Thumb'

Propagate from softwood or semi-ripe cuttings in summer. Good in pots or raised beds. Mulch well for winter protection. **H x S** 100cm x 60cm



good
for a sweet
scent

A SYMPHONY IN WHITE

If I close my eyes and inhale deeply I imagine that I can smell these paper-white daffodils through the pages of this magazine. It is always tricky to describe a scent but I reckon that those pure white flowers smell of every loving feeling that you have ever felt: love for a partner, love for a child, love for a parent or love for a puppy. Especially love for a puppy.

Narcissus papyraceus 'Ziva'

The best narcissus for forcing. Keep in the dark for eight weeks after planting in bowls then gradually bring into the light. Will need support. **H x S** 40cm x 10m

SAMBA TIME

The amaryllis bulb originates from the steaming jungles of southern Brazil. This variety is a particularly alluring colour that manages to be both traditional and yet deeply exotic. One flowering on a sideboard in, say, Sidmouth or Sunderland, can transport us to a late-night caper as the sun sets over Ipanema Beach. Suddenly the chills of winter are shrugged off and we find ourselves reaching for skimpy swimwear.

Hippeastrum 'Royal Velvet'

It is not too late to plant a hippeastrum. Plant in good compost with the top half of the bulb exposed. **H x S** 50cm x 10cm





HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

On the surface, the glory days of this lunaria are long past. Back in the spring, the mauvey flowers were scattered across our borders just as the sun began to warm our gardens. It was then forgotten amongst all the excitement of summer but now it is back and those little papery discs are catching the light and adding a bit of extra life to our winter.

Lunaria annua

Honesty is the perfect dried flower for indoor arrangements. Easy to grow, as it tends to self seed. Member of the brassica family.

H x S 90cm x 30cm



SOFT AND SHARP

To be honest we always need a few good evergreen combinations like this around the garden to give it a bit of permanent structure. A sedge and a simple spruce - fluffiness in juxtaposition with the needley goodness of a conifer. The perfect foil to all sorts of colourful shenanigans.

Carex oshimensis 'Evergold'

This Japanese sedge is a good evergreen for almost any conditions. Divide in early summer. **H x S** 30cm x 30cm

Picea glauca albertiana 'Conica'

This dwarf conifer eventually makes a dense cone shape. Best in sunshine. Take semi-ripe cuttings in summer. **H x S** 2m x 1.5m

Find more ways to use dwarf conifers from page 56