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Andy Sturgeon

HIT PARADE

Award-winning garden designer, Andy Sturgeon, reveals his favourite plants for keeping your garden going all year

There are plenty of classic winter garden plants, including the dogwoods, with their coloured stems and flowering shrubs like chimonanthus and coccococca, but they can be quite disappointing for the rest of the year. I cut my garden design teeth on small urban and suburban gardens, where space was always at a premium,

and that taught me to choose plants that had much more to offer than just fleeting beauty. No matter how exquisite a plant is at its peak, it has no room in any of my gardens unless it is a lot more than just a one-season wonder.

If you look around, there are actually plenty of plants that offer excellent value throughout the year, and also look wonderful in winter.

1

Trachelospermum jasminoides

I find it hard to avoid *Trachelospermum jasminoides*. In plenty of sun, this evergreen climber can flower for what seems like all summer. The scent is sweet, but often overlooked are the autumn tints, which add a reddish-hue to some of the leaves; unusual for an evergreen. Plants can easily be trained to cover a whole fence or trellis to make a green wall of foliage, which no other evergreen climber, apart from rampant ivy, can achieve. ▶



2 ← *Amelanchier lamarckii*

Amelanchier lamarckii is one of the stars of spring, when its smothering of starry white flowers are open at the same time as the coppery young leaves. Summer berries change to red and eventually darken, although it's the birds they bring in that are the real bonus, followed by the yellows and oranges of autumn leaves. And yet, despite all these attributes, I think I actually prefer it stark naked. In winter, the intertwined stems of a multi-stem tree or shrub are as good as any sculpture, and with a light shining up from beneath, grazing the grey bark of the trunks and making the canopy glow, it is simply unbeatable.



3 → *Phlox russeliana*

The colour yellow can generally be awkward and sometimes unloved, but I can't dispense with *Phlox russeliana*. You need to be a bit careful as it will take over if you take your eye off it, but the robust grey-green downy leaves make tight weed-beating clumps, and I like to use it at the front of borders and repeat it through the planting scheme, where it offsets daintier foliage. The whorls of pale-yellow flowers come in June and can last a month or more, but as they fade to dark globes, they come into their own; standing through autumn and winter on upright stems above the evergreen leaves, which really stand out against the dead leaves of their companions. Sitting among grasses and other seedheads, they are simply breathtaking.



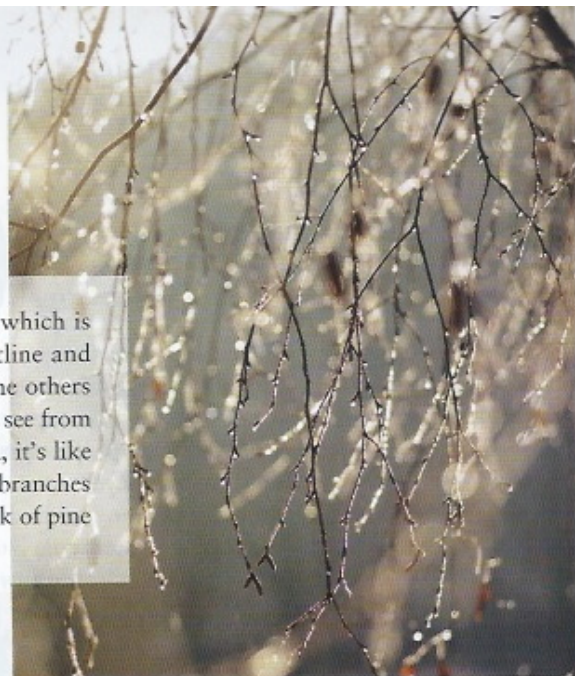
4 ← *Acer griseum*

If peeling bark is your thing, the paperbark maple, *Acer griseum*, is the sort of tree that gets even non-gardeners salivating, so you know you are onto something good. For maximum 'ooing' and 'aahing', I always put one near a path, so that the sun sets behind it and shines through the peeling coppery bark, making it irresistible. Covered in small winged fruit for much of the summer, the wine-red autumn tints arrive satisfyingly early, and although these small trees find a well-balanced shape on their own, I like to improve things by removing the odd branch here and there to let the sunlight in.



5 → *Betula pendula*

Winter gardens are rarely without a Himalayan, white-barked birch tree, which is great for a close encounter. However, seen from a distance, the winter outline and delicate branch network of our native birch, *Betula pendula*, outstrips all the others with its graceful, gently weeping form. I have one in my own garden that I can see from the upstairs windows, and each winter, once the yellow leaves have dropped, it's like being reacquainted with an old friend. Planted en masse, the slender twiggy branches create a purple haze, which in winter sunlight is stunning against the green bulk of pine trees, and if you get the jetwasher out, the bark scrubs up pretty well too.



6 ← *Molinia caerulea* subsp. *caerulea* 'Poul Petersen'

The purple moor grass, *Molinia caerulea* subsp. *caerulea* 'Poul Petersen', starts out as a neat clump of mid-green leaves, but sends out spikes of dark-purplish flowers as early as June, way before most grasses are doing anything. It then goes a rusty-brown colour in late summer, and fades as it heads into winter.



7 → *Nandina domestica*

The evergreen *Nandina domestica* will grow in sun or shade in most soils, and with its slender upright stems, it brings a certain elegance to almost any planting style. The leaves emerge as a soft-salmon colour in spring, followed by starry white flowers. The new leaves turn green and then autumn delivers a second round of fiery tints. The leaves remain coloured throughout winter, and the berries ripen to a vivid red.



8 ← *Mahonia eurybracteata* subsp. *ganpinensis* 'Soft Caress'

And now I must confess to a guilty pleasure. When I started out in the 1980s, *Mahonia x media* 'Charity' was all the rage because it is evergreen, tough, will grow in any soil and any aspect, and has scented late-autumn flowers and then dark-blue berries. But let's face it - it's not very subtle. Enter *M. eurybracteata* subsp. *ganpinensis* 'Soft Caress' to save the day. Far less brutish, with spineless, slender, graceful leaves, this compact 1m-tall shrub starts flowering in late summer and is genuinely beautiful in leaf. I've started using it in gravel gardens because the leaf shape contrasts so well with its neighbours. ►

9 → *Phlomis tuberosa* 'Amazone'

When I need some height, I'll opt for *Phlomis tuberosa* 'Amazone'. At up to 1.8m tall, the leaves are less imposing, and I often plant it with *Angelica gigas* and some of the taller panicums. The dark-purple stems have amethyst flowers and compared to its yellow cousin, there are far more of them per plant, leaving something of a thicket of flowerheads, which overwinter well.



10 ← *Carpinus betulus*

Hornbeam clipped as a hedge will retain its coppery leaves in winter, but an untrimmed tree will not. The fastigiate *Carpinus betulus* 'Frans Fontaine' has a very fine, dense branch network, so even without leaves they have quite a presence. Backlit, the twiggy, dark-grey silhouettes are outstanding.

11 → *Lavandula x intermedia* 'Grosso'

It is impossible to imagine lavender without bees, and *Lavandula x intermedia* 'Grosso' is a favourite. Being relatively small and with a strong-purple flower colour, it makes a good path edging, but I also choose this particular variety for the foliage, specifically its winter leaf. It is a wonderful silvery-grey, and as long as you trim it lightly after flowering, it remains incredibly neat in winter; appearing a little more evergreen, and therefore tidier than other varieties.



12 ← *Epimedium x perralchicum* 'Fröhnleiten'

Brilliant as an edging plant or a carpet under small trees and shrubs, *Epimedium x perralchicum* 'Fröhnleiten' is a truly year-round plant, which seems to lighten up dull corners. I find it invaluable for plugging gaps or filling awkward areas. In spring and autumn, the foliage colours up a reddish-bronze between the green veins, which is dazzling. Some people cut off the evergreen leaves in late winter, so that the pretty yellow flowers are seen at their best before the new leaves unfurl, but I must confess that I prefer the lazy option and leave them on.



13

←
Clerodendrum trichotomum
var. *fargesii*

Stretching the seasons comes naturally for the harlequin glorybower. At 5-6m tall, this exotic-looking shrub could be thought of more as a small tree. The new leaves are bronze as they appear in spring, and once they are pumped up into the green leaves of summer, pink buds explode into balls of fragrant white flowers with green sepals. These give way to shiny, metallic, turquoise berries held by star-shaped, scarlet calyces, which steal the show as the leaves yellow and drop in autumn. And if the birds don't get them, the berries last all winter.

14

→
Veronicastrum virginicum
'Fascination'

Usually grown for its tall, slender, lilac-flower spikes, *Veronicastrum virginicum* 'Fascination' is a stalwart of naturalistic, prairie-type planting schemes, where it adds an essential vertical accent against flat umbels, daisies, anguisorbas and grasses. Stunning in death, its spring and summer assets are often overlooked. Whorls of hemp-like foliage is green at first and becomes lightly tinged red, making this an eye-catching plant, long before the flower buds are even thinking about opening.



15

←
Rosa glauca

As time rolls on, I have adopted more and more roses into my palette, often picking them for scent, a lengthy flowering season, disease resistance and a glossy leaf. The one I use most has little to offer on paper, however. *Rosa glauca* has virtually no scent and the small but lovely flowers appear only once. The leaves, however, are extraordinary: slate-grey or bluish-purple on top, and almost crimson underneath, so that the whole plant shimmers. There is barely a mixed border where I haven't planted at least one. The small, scarlet hips shouldn't be forgotten either. They quickly follow the flowers and last well into winter, becoming increasingly noticeable as neighbouring plants go off the boil. ♦