

Calendar says winter but the garden she stirs

GARDEN MIND

By Rebecca Hart

It's the New Year but already we've been beaten by ice and snow and buried in seasonal obligations; January gives us time to pause.

As humans we like to gather the natural world around us: We place cut flowers and green potted plants along a window sill or a bright corner, or plant outside to frame the view from a favorite chair.

Maybe your spot of green is on a patio or small yard, festooned with busy feeders for the birds. Or maybe you call all the wide beauty that Portland offers your own private landscape, and honor



Hellborus niger 'Maestro' (Post photo by Rebecca Hart)

it on walks or drives.

Once we slow down, it's clear that winter is far from a time of "nothing going on."

Years ago I heard a tale about how the Native Americans who lived near the Breitenbush River learned to anticipate what we call the solstice season.

The sign: when the Red Alder buds swelled and the catkins formed, the alder outlines developed a distinctive red-brown cast; this change heralded the change in day length. Still holds true today.

And, beneath us, on the ground covered with wet leaves, you might find the sign of early bulbs, or some other fresh green emergent life stirring. But only if you stoop to look.

Botanical gardens and nurseries are good places to find plants to enhance whatever "window" your garden has.

When the Christmas trees and poinsettias go out the benches must fill with something after inventory, and all of a sudden we find rows of shelves filled with early potted and forced bulbs.

Look for the best selection on varieties of "bare root stock" with all their edibles and ornamental teasers: berries, asparagus roots, even fruit and flowering and shade trees and herbaceous perennials. January isn't always pretty at a nursery, but it is full of promise.

We are host to a banana belt region here. Your particular garden spot may have a more or less benign microclimate, meaning the varieties that you can successfully grow will depend on exposure, light, and moisture.

With that in mind, here are some things stirring in my garden at the first of the New Year.

I've got three species of primroses and they all begin to show precocious color and new foliage now, if I was



Ribes sanguineum 'Alba' (Post photo by Rebecca Hart)

successful in keeping the snails and slugs at bay.

I have a pale double mauve, and frilly double yellow, causing me to suspect the doubles are somehow more hardy. My hellebores, which freely flower and self-sow and mix up without any help from me, are also beginning to bloom.

Also in bud is the white form of the native flowering currant *Ribes sanguineum* "Alba," which normally won't pop until mid to late February, according to prior garden journal entries; but bud swells are fun to monitor anytime.

Early bulbs are beginning to show greenery: *Galanthus*, *Muscaria* (grape hyacinth), Daffodils (narcissus), early Tulips, and the vast Crocus family.

However, if you want to duplicate a planting or combination of bulbs (unless you can find some for sale, at a premium, already potted) the time to purchase most spring-flowering bulbs is late summer and fall, from mid-August through October, or when stock sells out.

For fragrance, the Viburnums are a class of shrubs that sport several spe-

cies with highly spicy flowers, many which bloom on bare stems: the *V. burkwoodii* cultivars, also the unforgettable pink Korean Spice Bush (*V. carlessii*).

My favorite is *V. bodnantense*, with its delicious clove-smelling pink flowers. A few more favorite early winter performers are the Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolia*) which is the state flower; those brilliant early yellow flowers have a scent that will knock you over!

This is a tiny short list of some action going on in my garden now. And now is the season to pause and look and see.

On the computer? Look for links and tutorials for "off-grid" projects and all types of gardening and homestead care. For more ideas, do a Google search for "Winter Garden Color." Here's a link for non-GMO [genetically modified organisms] seeds and more for your garden: <http://www.off-grid.info/food-independence/heirloom-seed-suppliers.html>.

Collect books and articles. Don't be afraid to ask, if you admire a particular landscape; gardeners love to visit about plants. Consider becoming a master gardener. Make friends at your local nursery.

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Get to know Girl Scouts

Girl Scouts of Oregon & SW Washington is hosting a "Get to Know Girl Scouts" event on Saturday, Jan. 4 at their Portland service center located at 9620 SW Barbur Blvd. The event will be offering girls and their families a chance to learn more about Girl Scouts, try fun activities and enjoy some sweet treats. The event is drop-in from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m., and is free and open to all. For more information, call 503-977-6848 or visit www.girlscoutsofsw.org.

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