

## Evening Meeting: **Winter Colour.**

Geoff Hodge, web Editor for the RHS, gave us an amusing talk on planting for winter colour. Garden centres tend not to stock for this, so think first how you can achieve colour; berries, fruit, variegated leaves, coloured leaves and stems. Plant for winter colour close to the house, to catch the eye. Sharpen your hoes to keep down weeds. Geoff's essential message was; think first where you want to plant it, and will the plant thrive there? Choose your space correctly and remember that plants will grow taller and wider.

Evergreens are architectural, especially if frosted. Conifers can be used for shape, form and colour but be cautious as they can grow rapidly. Try to reflect the changing seasons. There are winter-flowering heathers, but only if the soil is acid. Ceanothus prefers a sunny or south facing wall, and C. Zanzibar has attractive variegated foliage. Convolvulus Cneorum is a small shrub with silver leaves and white flowers needing full sun. Silver leaved plants are good for dry conditions, needing less water. Eleagnus "Gilt Edge" has lovely scented flowers in winter and golden edged leaves. Leucothoe "Scarletta" is metallic evergreen with scarlet leaves in

Winter, best for ground cover or containers in the shade. Pieris needs acid soil and light shade without morning sun. "Flaming Silver" has splendid red leaves, best in containers of ericaceous compost.

There are coloured sedges, Carex siderosticha "variegata" has pale yellow edges on bright green leaves but will spread if unchecked. Euphorbias come in a range of bright or greenish yellows, but the sap is irritant. (Poinsettia is a euphorbia so be careful.) Lamium maculata "White Nancy" has pale grey-green leaves reflecting silver, and lifts shady areas but can spread. Consider ornamental cabbages in purples, reds and yellows fading to white.

Hamamelis x intermedia "Pallida" has the strongest scent, needing good moisture-retaining soil. The yellow varieties smell best, but there are oranges and reds. Mahonia x media "Charity" has spikes of yellow flowers, and strong scent. Viburnum x bodnantense is fragrant and has pretty pink flowers on bare stems. Helleborus foetidus "Wester Flisk Group" have red tinged stalks and yellow flowers. Geoff advised that poor flowering winter pansies are usually due to planting too late, and should be planted before September. Primula "Alaska", hardy cyclamen, and Galanthus "Dionysius" are all reliable. Don't forget the berries of Cotoneaster, Skimmias, hollies and Pyracantha "Navaho". The dogwoods such as Cornus Alba "Sibirica" for red stems and Rubus thibetanus for stark white canes can be stunning. If all else fails, use colorful containers, water features, or statuary to give interest.