

From Granny's Garden: Witch Hazel

by Cam MacKenzie



For the Garden Club Show and Tell in January, I brought in some boughs of witch-hazel - Hamamelis.

It is one of my favorite shrubs because it flowers in mid-winter when few other shrubs do and before the leaves come out. I have two species.

Hamamelis mollis 'Pallida': More upright than most with dense clusters of fragrant, spidery, yellow flowers, Pallida's large hazel-like leaves turn yellow in the fall.

Hamamelis x intermedia 'Jelina': This shrub has spectacular, fragrant, orange, spidery flowers. Jelina's large leaves turn a gorgeous red and orange colour before dropping in the fall.

Both shrubs will hang on to their flowers for 2 to 3 months from December through February.

They are quite wide with a spread and height to 10 feet, so they are not suitable for all gardens. They like sun and acidic, well-drained soil and seem to be able to stand extreme dry conditions in the summer after they have become established.

Pruning can be done selectively. One of my shrubs is right beside the driveway, so it usually gets 2 or 3 branches taken right back to curtail its enthusiasm.



Propagation is not easy. Most witch-hazels that we get here have been grafted on nursery-raised stock, so care must be taken that shoots are not allowed to grow below the graft. Layering is possible, but not easy. Try to buy your Hamamelis in bloom so that you will be assured that you are getting the colour you want.

