

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 12-14-05) Winter Rhodies © 2005

Would you believe a pink rhodie is splendidly blooming in our front garden? I kid you not it's a rhodie we planted about ten years ago called 'Christmas Cheer' It's fairly compact at 4 foot by 4 foot and covered with more than forty lovely pink blooms.

Our 'Christmas Cheer' rhodie came from Whitney Gardens in Brinnon. For years we couldn't figure out why it was called 'Christmas Cheer' because it would always bloom in January, usually one or two days before a good snow. Then the blossoms would wilt and fall off or just look quite limp for several weeks. This year it actually bloomed about a week before the snowfall we had on December 1.

You could find a rhody for blooms nearly each month of the year. 'PJM' blooms the earliest in February and March. It has wonderful bronzy foliage through the dead of winter. Next comes hundreds of petite purple-lavender blossoms. PJMs grow taller than they grow wide. This tidy rhody would even be a good container grown candidate for several years.

In our garden another stunning winter plant lives nearly next to our PJM. It's Callicarpa with vibrant purple berries marching up and down its stems. The berries this time of year hint of PJM's blossoms arriving in spring. Our Callicarpa's leaves in summer are splashed with chartreuse turning to crimson and orange in fall. I, alas, do not know the variety of our Callicarpa but your favorite local nursery will probably have several temptations from which to choose. There's even a variety with white berries.

Many ornamental grasses add texture and interest in the winter garden. Any number of bronze carex are excellent choices because even when foliage dies during winter, the bronze colors remain until new foliage emerges in the spring. Carex morowii varieties have wide evergreen leafs bordered in creamy white. I have a tiny Carex morowii filling up a square hyper-tufa pot.

Last but not least don't forget to add several hellebores to your winter garden. Hellebores will happily live in containers, love to grow in colonies festooning the garden, make wonderful border plantings and are an all around seasonal interest plant. Hellebores are often known as Lenten Roses. Buds are beginning to emerge on the hellebore in a container on my front porch. Heronswood in Kingston has a Hellebore Open House at the nursery every February.

These crisp clear winter days are perfect for taking a stroll through neighborhoods. Peak into the gardens as you walk by. You may notice plants that shine in the chill of winter. Look through the horticulture books from the Heronswood-donated collection available at our Kitsap Regional Libraries. Or stroll through your favorite nursery to find some of your own perfect plants for winter gardens. We can never have too many plants.

The Winter issue of "WestSound Home & Garden" is on the newsstands now. It's available at groceries, markets, local bookstores including Barnes and Noble, at local

design centers and many nurseries. If you can't locate a copy call WetApple Publications at 360-876-7900 or visit the website [www.wshomeandgarden.com](http://www.wshomeandgarden.com). I have a column in WSH&G called "Get the Dirt." I've also written several of the pieces in the magazine and will have stories in WSH&G each issue. WSH&G is published quarterly.

I hope this holiday of love, joy and laughter is filling your homes and families with the peace of the season. Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Good Kwanza and Peace to each of you.

*Contact Peg in care of this newspaper or email [ptillery@co.kitsap.wa.us](mailto:ptillery@co.kitsap.wa.us) or [gardenmentor@yahoo.com](mailto:gardenmentor@yahoo.com)*