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# Growing Hellebores: How to Care for Hellebore Flowers



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# Enjoy Critter-Resistant, Early-Blooming, Shade-Loving Hellebore

By [Robin Sweetser](#)

Last Updated: January 7, 2025



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Hellebores, also called Lenten Roses, are often the first blooms of the year! These winter-flowering perennials (yes, winter!) steal the show as they poke through the snow. Learn more about growing long-lived, deer-resistant hellebores.

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## About Hellebores

Hellebores bear glossy, evergreen leaves and rose-like flowers which bloom in winter or early spring. Though they are commonly called a “rose,” they are *not* in the [rose family](#)! Actually, they are more closely related to buttercups since both belong to the [Ranunculus](#) family.

Aristocrats of woodland gardens in

great ground cover for well-draining soil  
under the shade of trees.

Importantly, hellebores are resistant to  
deer and voles!

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I grow mine near the back porch so that I  
can keep a close eye on the progress of  
these eagerly awaited blossoms. The flow-  
ers make up for their lack of fragrance by  
being long-lived, remaining on the plant  
into early summer.

At a time of year when every blossom is  
precious, you'll find that there is nothing



*Hellebores flowers. Photo: Robin Sweetser*

#### Read Next

- [How to Grow Ranunculus: The Complete Guide](#)
- [The Earliest-Blooming Spring Bulbs](#)
- [How to Grow Snowdrops: The Complete Guide](#)

## PLANTING

Hellebores like the same conditions as many other early bloomers—cool, dappled shade and moist but well-draining, humusy soil. Take care to amend the soil with plenty of organic matter, such as well-aged leaf mold and/or compost.

They look great as understory plants with rhododendrons and azaleas planted along



*Tiny new buds emerge early in the spring as soon as they can break through the soil.*

*Photo: Robin Sweetser*

## GROWING

Slow to become established, hellebores take a few years to settle in before they bloom, so you need to be patient. Like peonies, hellebores are long-lived and will eventually develop into large clumps with extensive root systems.

Cold hardy to Zone 4, they are more susceptible to loss if grown in a hot, humid environment. They are not heavy feeders; a yearly application of well-rotted manure or compost early in the spring will keep them satisfied.



Close up of a lenten rose. Photo:  
Robin Sweetser

## Types

### The Christmas Rose

The Christmas rose (*H. niger*) will bloom from December through March. Snow may cover them up, but the flower buds and blooms will still be there when the snow melts! Their evergreen leaves look a little ratty after a long winter, but they are soon replaced with fresh new ones.

Their five-petaled, ivory-white blossoms are about 3 inches across and resemble large, single roses.



A well-established Christmas rose will stand about 12 to 15 inches tall and bear 20 stems of flowers. Some blossoms turn pink as they age, but mine mature to a yellow shade.

## The Lenten Rose

The Lenten rose (*H. orientalis*) blooms in April in my northern garden, so in most years, it technically blossoms during at least part of Lent. It is a little larger than the Christmas rose, standing about 24 inches tall, and produces up to 30 stems, each topped with two or three nodding blossoms. The flowers are about 3 inches across, but since they readily cross with other species of hellebores, they come in



white to pink, maroon, lilac, and deep purple.



*Group of lenten roses. Photo: Robin Sweetser*

Many of the Lenten Rose's blossoms have freckles, blushes of contrasting colors, or even stripes, and there are single and double forms. Let your plant go to seed, and in a few years, you will be able to harvest the hybrid seedlings that come up underneath the plant's protective leaves.

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## WIT AND WISDOM

- Their species name refers to the roots, which are black—and poisonous. In fact, the word *hellebore* in Greek means “food to kill,” so be cautious when working around them. [Some experts recommend wearing gloves](#) when cutting back the leaves and being sure to keep any plant-munching pets or children away from them.
- [See more winter-blooming flowers!](#)

**FLOWERS**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Robin Sweetser



Robin has been a contributor to The Old Farmer’s Almanac and the All-Seasons Garden Guide for many years. [Read More from](#)

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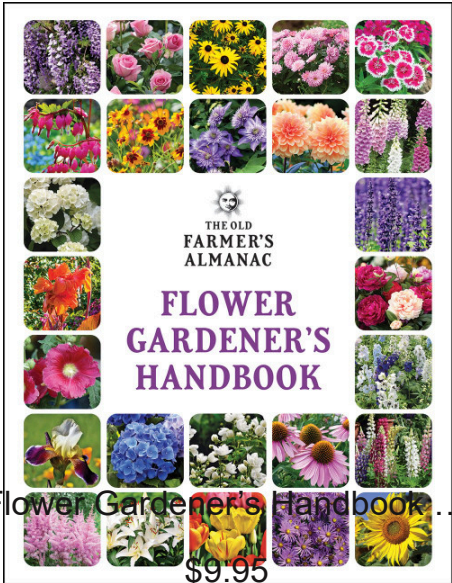




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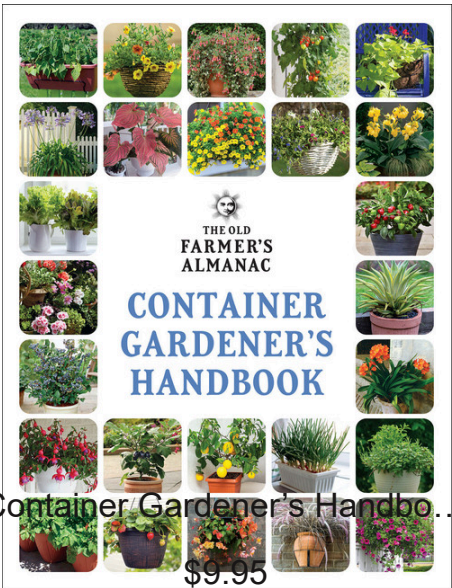
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