

FRAGRANT WINTERSWEET

Chimonanthus praecox

Strawberry-shrub Family (Calycanthaceae)

Zones: 4-6

Full Sun

Moderate Water

Location: Fragrance Garden



This shrub is native to China, and an excellent one to have in the garden if you are looking for late winter interest and fragrance. It grows in a broad, upright form, but can easily become leggy with age if not properly pruned. If desired, it can also be pruned into a small tree, or even into an espalier form.

This shrub is inconspicuous and may be easily missed if you are not seeking it out in particular in the garden. In late winter, look for its subtle, thimble-sized flowers and follow your nose. Once you discover this winter delight, be prepared to have a new favorite in your own garden.

This shrub is an early bloomer, and shows its flowers between January and February. The flowers are pendant, waxy and clear yellow in color, with purple throats. They are extremely fragrant and have a pleasant, spicy scent. The flowers are edible and can be used to make tea. Prune immediately after blooming to encourage a vibrant, full shape. Flowers will occur on wood that is one year old, so let the stems regrow and do not prune further in the summer or fall.

When the spring is closely at hand, the blossoms will fall off, leaving the empty branches to leaf out. The leaves are glossy, dark green and elongated, with points that are sharply tapered. In fall, the colors will fade to yellow-green and yellow. Chimonanthus prefers to be planted in fertile, well-drained soil and needs little to no pruning.