

Gather Lenten roses for a simple, cheerful windowsill display.



Winter's First Bouquet

While other plants are fast asleep, Lenten roses spring up early to put on a show in your garden.

BY **GENE B. BUSSELL**

Hidden beneath oak trees in the mountains of West Virginia is a hillside garden that grew from one man's passion for hellebores, or Lenten roses. He has grown a staggering collection of them—more than 100,000—and knows each plant on his 60-acre nursery like an old friend. “They’re kinda like snowflakes,” he explains. “Each bloom is unique.”

He is Barry Glick, owner of Sunshine Farm and Gardens in Renick. Barry specializes in breeding double hellebores, but he grows all kinds. His collection is the largest in the South, hands down.

Fellow gardener Sparrow Huffman has known Barry all her life and finds his garden inspirational. “To have that amount of color and life in the dead of winter is simply magical,” she says.

Lenten roses (*Helleborus orientalis*) and hybrids (*H. x hybridus*) get their ecclesiastical nickname from their growing season. It begins in winter and extends into spring, surrounding the season of Lent.

Lenten roses aren't really roses at all. They're shade-loving evergreen perennials that have beautiful bell- or cup-shaped flowers—either single or double blooms—and lacy, umbrella-like foliage. Lenten roses come in shades of pink, purple, white, yellow—even black (blooms can have freckles). Blossoms sometimes face outward but more often nod gently downward. As they mature and form seeds, the flowers fade to light pastel shades.

Once seeds drop and sprout, you'll be rewarded

RIGHT: Winter gardening delivers beautiful Lenten roses—and an instant smile—to West Virginia native Sparrow Huffman.



This pale yellow is one of the newer colors now available.



LEFT: Barry uses a No. 8 camel hair paintbrush to transfer pollen from bloom to bloom, creating new hybrids.

RIGHT: Float a mix of flowers in a shallow dish for a beautiful display.

with new plants to transplant into your garden (do this in the fall) or to share with friends.

Lenten roses are great as cut flowers. Keep in mind that mature flowers will last longer than newer ones just starting to bloom. Use them alone in small bouquets, or mix them with other flowers. Try floating several blooms in a shallow dish, just like you'd float camellias. Or drop a few into a small vase, and put it on your windowsill. However you display them, Lenten roses will lift your spirits on a chilly winter's day. *

SUNSHINE FARM AND GARDENS: *To learn more or to order Barry's bellebores (and a whole lot of other great plants), visit sunfarm.com.*



Double Blooms



Single Blooms



Lenten Roses at a Glance

TYPE: Carefree, long-lived perennials often used as a ground cover

LIGHT: They prefer light shade.

SOIL: Plants thrive in well-drained soil, with lots of organic matter to retain some moisture. Plants do not like wet soil. Established plants are drought-tolerant.

FERTILIZER: They don't struggle at all if they are not fed but will flourish if you provide a balanced slow-release fertilizer.

PESTS/DISEASES: Deer- and vole-proof; no diseases

GROOMING: Once new foliage emerges, cut away any tattered foliage from last year's growth.

RANGE: Upper South, Middle South, and Lower South. In the Coastal South, be sure to provide ideal drainage and full shade. You can even grow them in pots.

PURCHASE: Now, when the selection is best at nurseries and garden centers. Expect to pay \$15-\$20 for gallon-size plants.

Planting Tips

- **Plant small groups** (three to five plants together), spacing plant groups about 18 to 24 inches apart.
- **Be sure not to plant too deep.** Do not bury the crown of the plant.
- **Plant Lenten roses with other shade-loving perennials**, such as ferns, hostas, gingers, foamflowers, and toad lilies, in a wooded garden.
- **For a great ground cover, plant them en masse** (plants are 12 to 24 inches tall) by themselves.