

## FEATURED PLANT

### WINTERHAZEL

John Frett

WINTERHAZELS are a close relative of witch hazels and share their early flowering and typical yellow flower color. Plant heights vary from 4-5 feet for Buttercup Winterhazel and some of the compact cultivars, to 15 feet or more for Fragrant Winterhazel. The habit of *Corylopsis* is as wide or wider than tall, so plants need greater spacing than typically provided most shrubs. Fewer plants cover the same space—eco-friendly as well as econo-friendly.

While there are distinct differences among the winterhazels, there are also great similarities. So similar that 33 different species have recently been condensed into seven. Even the staunchest of winterhazel lovers and botanical splitters could not separate the numerous species. The current taxonomic treatment is more appropriate, especially from a landscape viewpoint. The list below represents the very best of winterhazels for gardening use.

Without a doubt, the fragrant yellow flowers are what's distinctive about the genus. Flowers occur in dangling clusters from 1-3 inches long. Buttercup Winterhazel has the most subtle fragrance but can be easily detected when you walk past the plant, while Fragrant Winterhazel will perfume an entire garden from late February-March. Yellow is the only flower color, though there are many variations, ranging from bright primrose yellow to chartreuse to lemon yellow. All are excellent candidates for forcing indoors in a vase beginning as early as December. Also when in flower, they make dazzling companions to well-timed blue flowering plants, such as blue *Chinodoxa* (Glory-of-the-snow), *Scilla* (Squill), or *Pulmonaria*. And of course there's the signature companion at Winterthur, *Rhododendron mucronulatum* (see photo at bottom right).

Foliage varies greatly among the winterhazels. Buttercup Winterhazel has the smallest leaves, followed by Spiked, Chinese (or Willmott) and finally Fragrant Winterhazel, with the largest and boldest texture. While most species have medium green foliage, there is considerable variation. The distinctive bluish-green leaves of Fragrant Winterhazel are one of its finest qualities. On 'Golden Spring' Spike Winterhazel, the new foliage emerges yellow with a tint of red, blazing into shades of canary yellow before fading to green in summer. Others, like 'Spring Purple' Chinese Winterhazel, infuse plum hues into the landscape, first in spring and sporadically throughout the summer.

Winterhazels are easy to grow. They do fine in full sun to part shade, and will grow in full shade though with some loss of flowering. They are effective when used as understory shrubs to high canopy trees. Once established, plants are not particular



Winterhazels' beaming rays of sunshine into the late winter garden.  
*Corylopsis glabrescens* Photo: Melinda Zoehrer

as to water; though they do not tolerate excessively wet roots and will require watering during a drought like we had last summer.

This is a largely unknown and greatly underused group of plants. Few shrubs offer the classy flower display during the winter. Pick a size, pick a texture, pick a foliage color: the combinations are numerous and the possibilities for your garden endless.



*Corylopsis pauciflora* with leaves emerging.  
Photo: Rebecca Pineo



*Corylopsis* 'Winterthur' and azaleas at Winterthur Gardens. Photo: Rick Darke



*Corylopsis* 'Winterthur' Photo: Rick Darke



*Corylopsis* 'Longwood Chimes' Photo: Rick Darke

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*Corylopsis* 'Winterthur' Winterhazel 5-6' ○●☁ 3 g, 2-3' \$45  
A hybrid winterhazel selected at Winterthur Gardens for the exceptional flower display in late winter and early spring. Plants produce copious quantities of 1-1.5 inch long, pendulous clusters of very fragrant, bright yellow flowers.

*Corylopsis glabrescens* Fragrant Winterhazel 8-15' ○●☁ 3 g, 3-4' \$45  
The boldest textured of the winterhazels, offering robust, blue-green foliage that is very attractive in the summer landscape. Although the foliage is lovely, it is the extraordinarily fragrant, 1½–2 inch long, lemon-yellow clusters of flowers that set this winterhazel apart (see catalog cover).

*Corylopsis glabrescens*  
Dwarf Fragrant Winterhazel 3-5' ○●☁ 3 g, 3-4' \$45  
A fabulous compact plant discovered at Blue Sterling Nursery in New Jersey that combines the best of many winterhazels. The most common limitation to Fragrant Winterhazel is the size and this selection solves that. It retains the bold, blue-green foliage and exquisitely fragrant flowers all on a compact plant about half the normal size. A real gem for the small garden not available elsewhere.



*Corylopsis glabrescens* 'Longwood Chimes'  
Winterhazel 10-12' ○●☁ 3 g, 2-3' \$45  
Selected at Longwood Gardens from seed collected by Clifford Parks of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1983. Flowers are larger and more pendulous than most other winterhazels and the heavenly scented flowers waft throughout the garden. Plants flower about two weeks later than most other corylopsis, thus avoiding late frosts.

*Corylopsis pauciflora*  
Buttercup Winterhazel 4-6' ○●☁ 3 g, 2-4' \$45  
The smallest and most graceful of the winterhazels and difficult to find in the trade. The primrose yellow, fragrant flowers are produced in early spring before forsythia. While flower clusters are smaller than other winterhazels, the number of them makes up for any lack in size. Summer foliage is a distinctive bright green with prominent bristle-tipped teeth.

*Corylopsis glabrescens* leaf  
Photo: John Frett

Latin Name	Common Name	Mature Size	Light	Soil	Pot Size, Plant Size	Price
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*Corylopsis sinensis* var. *sinensis* 'Spring Purple'  
Chinese Winterhazel 6-12' ○●☁ 1 g, 6"-1' \$25  
[Syn: *Corylopsis willmottiae*] Willmott or Chinese Winterhazel is intermediate among the winterhazels with regard to foliage, flower, and plant size. The fragrant, soft yellow flowers appear in March before the leaves in dangling 2–3 inch clusters. After flowering, the new foliage emerges plum colored, maturing to green, though plum splashes continue in summer with late season flushes of growth.

*Corylopsis spicata* 'Golden Spring'  
Spike Winterhazel 4-6' ○●☁ 3 g, 1-2' \$45  
[Syn: *Corylopsis spicata* 'Aurea'] The fragrant yellow flowers open in late March to early April, dangling from the branches in 2-inch long chains. After flowering, the foliage emerges canary-yellow and remains such into June, then fades to green in summer's heat.

*Corylopsis spicata* Spike Winterhazel 4-8' ○●☁ 7 g, 3-6' \$45  
Bare branches glow with sweetly scented clusters of pendant, pale yellow flowers. As flowers fade, leaves unfurl. A wide-spreading, twiggy shrub with an attractive zig-zag growth habit.

## QUICK REFERENCE FOR CULTURAL SYMBOLS

In order to help you select the right plant for your gardening needs, we have included the symbols below to indicate plant needs. These are broad guidelines, as plants often can withstand a wider range of conditions. Plants that prefer part shade may grow well in full sun if there is adequate soil moisture during hot, dry spells. Similarly, plants that prefer moist soils may grow well in drier sites if some shade is provided, especially midday.

### Light Recommendations

○ full sun      ● partial sun      ● full shade

### Soil Moisture Recommendations

☁ dry soil      ☁ moist soil      ☁ wet soil

### Attract Birds, Butterflies and Caterpillars

☁ birds      ☁ butterflies and caterpillars

### Nativity

"N" after the plant description indicates plants are native to the Eastern United States. Cultivars of native plants are also considered native, as these are a selection from variants in the population.