Celebrate winter...

Tucked away in the deep green woodland, you’ll find a “winter feast” for the senses in the Witt Winter Garden. Discover the garden’s striking colors, textures, fragrances and structure. This small garden room contains a rare winter abundance of flowers, seeds and fruit for wildlife to nibble. You’ll find winter birds make this place especially playful and lively.

Originally created in 1949, the Winter Garden underwent a substantial renovation in 1988. Credit for the garden’s redesign belongs to Professor Iain Robertson, of the University of Washington Department of Landscape Architecture. He imagined a “woodland room” in keeping with the character of the Washington Park Arboretum. Western red cedar (Thuja plicata, ḥapayac) and Douglas-fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii, sč obedac) trees create a backdrop for many striking winter plants. Arboretum staff maintain a dynamic plant collection that includes many rare and unusual treasures. Natives grow among them to further integrate this special place with the surrounding Arboretum. An expanse of lawn invites visitors into the center of the garden. Deservingly, the garden was named in honor of Joseph A. Witt, long-time curator of the Arboretum who was especially devoted to this collection. The Arboretum Foundation provided funding support the 1988 renovation. The garden’s largest bed, Bed H, was renovated in 2010 to add more diversity and color to the landscape and to open up the views to the rest of the garden. Unit 3 of the Lake Washington Garden Club funded the most recent renovation.

To find the Joseph A. Witt Winter Garden: exit the west side of the Graham Visitors Center and cross Arboretum Drive East. Then follow the large diagonal trail heading south from the orientation map on the west side of the road. Other collections in the Arboretum show beautifully through winter. Consider visiting the adjacent Woodland Garden, and further afield, our collections of Camellias, Hollies, Witch Hazels, and conifers — all shine during this season.

“Hear! Hear!” screamed the jay from a neighboring tree, where I had heard a tittering for some time, “winter has a concentrated and nutty kernel, if you know where to look for it.”

— Henry David Thoreau

Map updated on 1/29/2024
PLANT LIST

BED A
1. Hamamelis x intermedia ‘Ruby Glow’
2. Hamamelis x inter. ‘Orange Beauty’
3. Hamamelis x intermedia ‘Primavera’
4. Helleborus x hybridus
5. Pulmonaria sp.
6. Sarcococca hookeriana var. digyna
7. Mahonia (Berberis) x media ‘Lionel Fortescue’
8. Rhododendron ‘Seta’
9. Rhododendron dauricum
10. Rhododendron ‘Anchorite’
11. Rhododendron ‘Saunders Ruby’
12. Corylopsis sinensis ‘Spring Purple’
13. Ribes laurifolium
14. Mahonia (Berberis) ‘Arthur Menzies’
15. Hamamelis x inter. ‘Westertede’
16. Rhododendron cyanocarpum
17. Hamamelis x intermedia ‘De Belder #965’
18. Acer circinatum

BED B
1. Helleborus x hybridus
2. Hamamelis x intermedia ‘Pallida’
3. Berberis x gladwynensis ‘William Penn’
4. Berberis cordifolia ‘Rotblum’
5. Helleborus x hybridus ‘Winter Jewels’
6. Ribes sanguineum (Early Betty)
7. Cyclamen hederifolium
8. Osmanthus heterophyllus ‘Goshiki’
9. Mahonia (Berberis) ‘Arthur Menzies’
10. Hydrangea anomala ssp. petiolaris
11. Garrya elliptica ‘Evie’
12. Garrya x issaquahensis
13. Cornus stolonifera ‘Kelsey’s Dwarf’
14. Lonicera standishii
15. Lonicera fragrantissima
16. Azara microphylla
17. Helleborus argutifolius

BED C
1. Ophiopogon planiscapus ‘Ebony Knight’
2. Chimonanthus praecox
3. Iris foetidissima
4. Carex morrowii ‘Variegata’
5. Cornus sanguinea ‘Midwinter Fire’
6. Helleborus [Frostkiss™ Reanna’s Ruby™]
7. Callicarpa japonica
8. Salix irrorata
9. Salix alba ‘Vittellina’
10. Ilex verticillata ‘Afterglow’
11. Cornus stolonifera ‘Flaviramea’
12. Salix acutifolia ‘Pendulifolia’
13. Salix melanostachys
14. Ilex verticillata ‘Southern Gentleman’
15. Cyclamen hederifolium
16. Acorus gramineus ‘Ogon’
17. Daphniphyllum macropodon

BED D
1. Acer palmatum ‘Sango-kaku’
2. Acer griseum
3. Betula albo-sinensis var. septentrionalis
4. Helleborus x hybridus
5. Brachyglottis ‘Sunshine’
6. Rhododendron ‘Bubblegum’
7. Helleborus [HGC Pink Frost]
8. Acorus gramineus ‘Variegatus’

BED E
1. Rhododendron arboreum hybrid
2. Helleborus x hybridus
3. Osmanthus heterophyllus ‘Variegatus’
4. Abeliophyllum distichum
5. Acer palmatum ‘Matsumurae’
6. Acer tegmentosum ‘Joe Witt’
7. Acer caudatifolium
8. Ruscus hypoglossum
9. Acer circinatum
10. Mahonia (Berberis) ‘Arthur Menzies’
11. Rhododendron barbatum

BED F
1. Ilex verticillata ‘Red Sprite’
2. Arctostaphylos ‘Howard McMinn’
3. Magnolia stellata ‘Rosea’
4. Helleborus ‘Abccd02’ [Anna’s Red™]
5. Edgeworthia chrysantha
6. Thuja plicata ‘Grune Kugel’
7. Viburnum x bodnantense ‘Dawn’
8. Rhododendron ‘Snow Lady’
9. Chamaecyparis obtusa ‘Verdoni’
10. Rhododendron ‘Landmark’
11. Helleborus ‘Walhelivor’ [Ivy Prince™]

BED G
1. Acer palmatum ‘Burgundy Lace’
2. Acer palmatum ‘Kagiri-nishiki’
3. Acer palmatum form
4. Sarcococca hookeriana var. humilis
5. Galanthus nivalis

BED H
1. Acer palmatum ‘Murogawa’
2. Epimedium ‘Black Sea’
3. Galanthus waronowii
4. Adiantum venustum
5. Rhododendron ‘Seta’
6. Corylus maxima ‘Atropurpurea Superba’
7. Danae racemosa
8. Epimedium wushanense
9. Viburnum x bodnantense ‘Dawn’
10. Callicarpa bodinieri var. gir. ‘Profusion’
11. Acer palmatum ‘Japanese Sunrise’
12. Ruscus hypoglossum
13. Corylopsis sinensis var. calvescens
14. Corylopsis spicata
15. Rhod. mucronulatum ‘Cornell Pink’
16. Rhododendron lutescens
17. Cotoneaster tanguyehensis
18. Taxus baccata ‘Fastigiata Aurea’
19. Rhododendron strigillosum
20. Rhododendron ‘PMJ Elite’
21. Rhododendron ‘PMJ Regal’
22. Acer tegmentosum ‘Joe Witt’
23. Helleborus [HGC Shooting Star™]
24. Ophiopogon planiscapus
25. Thujopsis dolobrata ‘Nana’
26. Calluna vulgaris ‘Firefly’
27. Epimedium pinnatum ‘Thunderbolt’
28. Helleborus x hyb. ‘Golden Sunrise’
29. Helleborus [HGC Cinnamon Snow™]
30. Carex oshimensis ‘Evergold’
31. Epimedium versicolor ‘Cherry Tart’
32. Leucothoe fontanesiana ‘Nana’
33. Viburnum x bodnantense ‘Deben’
34. Viburnum x bodnantense ‘Charles Lamont’
35. Berberis ‘Ruby Elf’
36. Salix ‘Swizzlestick’
37. Calluna vulgaris ‘Spring’
38. Rhod. mucronulatum (dwarf form)
39. Cyclamen coum
40. Rhododendron dilatatum
41. Cyclamen coum
42. Sequoia sempervirens ‘Henderson Blue’
43. Viburnum farreri ‘Candidissimum’
44. Stewartia sinensis
45. Pulmonaria ‘Sissinghurst White’

BED I
1. Helleborus x hybridus
2. Viburnum tinus ‘Variegata’
3. Ilex x altaclerensis ‘Hendersonii’
4. Garrya elliptica ‘Siskiyou Jade’
5. Elaeagnus pungens ‘Maculata’
6. Osmanthus heterophyllus ‘Sasaba’

BED K
1. Hamamelis japonica var. flavopurpureascens
2. Sarcococca hookeriana var. digyna
3. Viburnum tinus ‘Lucidum’
4. Viburnum foetens
5. Camellia sasanqua ‘Shichi Fukujin’
6. Camellia sasanqua ‘Mine-no-yuki’
7. Stachyurus chinensis
8. Chimonanthus praecox
9. Viburnum farreri
10. Viburnum farreri ‘Nanum’
11. Hamamelis japonica var. arborea
12. Camellia sasanqua ‘Setsugekka’
13. Camellia sasanqua
14. Camellia sasanqua ‘Kokinran’
15. Berberis cordifolia ‘Rotblum’
16. Polystichum setiferum ‘Rotundatum Cristatum’

BED L
1. Vaccinium ovatum ‘Vacsid1’
2. Abeliophyllum distichum
3. Trillium ovatum
4. Polystichum polyblepherus
5. Viburnum tinus ‘Pink Prelude’
6. Iris foetidus
7. Sarcococca confusa
8. Sarcococca hookeriana var. digyna
9. Mahonia (Berberis) ‘Arthur Menzies’
10. Ruscus aculeatus
11. Camellia x williamsii ‘Stryker 50-1-3’
12. Camellia ‘Wabisuke’
13. Camellia pitardii ‘Apple Blossom’
14. Camellia x williamsii ‘Mary Christian’
15. Camellia sasanqua
16. Camellia sp.
17. Polystichum setiferum ‘Rotundatum Cristatum’
BED M
1 Pieris japonica 'Mountain Fire'
2 Hamamelis mollis
3 Sarcococca hookeriana var. digyna
4 Hamamelis x intermedia ‘Hitlington’
5 Jasminum nudiflorum
6 Hamamelis x intermedia ‘Jelena’
7 Picea mariana ‘Nana’
8 Liriope muscari ‘Big Blue’
9 Cyclamen coum
10 Stewartia monadelpha
11 Euonymus fortunei var. radiata ‘Gracilis’
12 Garrya x issaquahensis ‘Carl English’
13 Camellia sasanqua ‘Hinode-gumo’
14 Hamamelis vernalis
15 Nandina domestica ‘Harbor Dwarf’
16 Mahonia (Berb.) x media ‘Winter Sun’
17 Sarcococca hookeriana var. humilis
18 X Fatshedera lizei
19 Sarcococca confusa
20 Camellia ‘Ack-Scent Sno’
21 Camellia ‘Ack-Scent White’
22 Camellia ‘Ack-Scent Star’
23 Epimedium x perralchicum
24 Helleborus [HGC Josef Lemper®]

BED O
1 Epimedium x perralchicum
2 Mahonia (Berberis) ‘Arthur Menzies’
3 Leucothoe fontanesiana ‘Rainbow’

KAEMPFERI BED
1 Hamamelis x intermedia ‘Fire Charm’
2 Hamamelis japonica ‘Zuccariniana’
3 Hamamelis mollis ‘Gold Crest’
4 Mahonia (Berb.) pinnata ‘Ken Hartman’
5 Corylopsis gotoana
6 Corylopsis glabrescens
7 Rehderodendron macrocarpum

Joseph A. Witt Winter Garden
WINTER GARDEN TOUR

BED A Featured plants of this bed include witch hazel cultivars (Hamamelis) winter-flowering mahonias. Mahonia (Berberis) 'Arthur Menzies' and 'Lionel Fortescue' bloom December through January and draw our year-round resident Anna's hummingbirds to their bright, nectar-rich flowers.

BED B Azara microphylla adds an interesting element to the evergreen backdrop of Bed B. The lacy, tiny green leaved tree has tiny yellow flowers that smell like white chocolate when they bloom. Evergreen silk-tassel bush (Garrya) grows in the foreground where its elegant vertical tassels can be appreciated. Don't miss the fruity fragrance of the winter honeysuckle (Lonicera standishii) shrubs at the south end of this bed.

BED C Colorful stems provide the theme of this bed, known informally as the “twig bed.” Cornus sanguinea ‘Midwinter Fire’ blazes yellow, orange and red, and willows (Salix) add to the mix. Black Mondo grass (Ophiopogon planiscapus 'Ebury Knight') carpets the bed beneath the yellow-twig dogwood (Cornus stolonifera 'Flaviramea'). The delicate wintersweet (Chimonanthus praecox) blossoms in January. These fragrant flowers are pale cream with reddish centers.

BED D Bark is the highlight of this bed. These birches (Betula albosinensis var. septentrionalis) just might be the most striking trees in this garden. Their peeling, bright pinkish-white bark as well as their placement in the garden make them top contenders. This is especially true when low winter sun shines on and through its bark. The birches share the spotlight with the paper bark maple (Acer griseum), and the coral bark maple (Acer palmatum 'Sango-kaku'). A mixture of hellebores (Helleborus) provide evergreen interest and flowers below the trees.

BED E One plant of interest is Osmanthus heterophyllus 'Variegatus'. This looks like a holly but unlike typical English holly it has opposite leaves and doesn’t seed around the garden. The white-flowering forsythia (Abeliophyllum distichum) also has a misleading “common name” as it is not a member of the genus Forsythia. Ruscus hypoglossum makes an attractive groundcover and features unusual “cladodes”, modified stems that look like leaves, each with a flower in the middle of the “leaf.”

BED F This bed has been recently updated with plantings of the late blooming manzanita, Arctostaphylos 'Howard McMinn', and the fragrant Nepalese paper bush, Edgeworthia chrysantha. Magnolia stellata 'Royal Star' brings the flowering season in the garden to a close in late April.

BED H This bed was renovated in 2010, and new plants continue to be added today. Look for a variety of early blooming rhododendrons in bright colors, and herbaceous plants such as Epimedium, Hellebore, Cyclamen coum and ferns. There are also three young trees that offer excellent bark effects: Acer tegmentosum ‘Joe Witt’, a variety of the Manchurian stripe-bark maple selected here in the Arboretum for its especially white bark, Stewartia sinensis, a tree with bark that will show attractive patterns of cinnamon, grey and cream as it ages, and Acer palmatum ‘Japanese Sunrise’ which has brightly colored young shoots in yellows and reds.

BED I The brightly variegated Elaeagnus pungens ‘Maculata’ lightens this sheltered path. Also find another selection of the silk-tassel bush, Garrya elliptica ‘Siskyou Jade’, and an the unusual cultivar of the holly osmanthus, Osmanthus heterophyllus ‘Sasaba’, which features fragrant blooms in November.

BED K Deciduous shrubbery surrounds a beautiful grove of Camellias. Among them, you’ll see Camellia sasanqua ‘Kokinran’ with peppermint-striped flowers. Even more varieties of witch hazel (Hamamelis), including the stately Hamamelis japonica var. arborea, grow here. Find Stachyurus chinensis with its late winter creamy flowers, and two Viburnum species (V. foetens and V. fareri).

BED L Viburnum tinus contributes year-round beauty with long blooming white flowers, metallic blue fruit, and evergreen leaves. Some of these varieties of Camellia were planted in the 1950’s. They make a fabulous flowering background. Mahonia (Berberis) 'Arthur Menzies' makes a bold statement all year, but its wintertime yellow flower spikes provide the icing on the cake. Just stand a moment and you'll likely see hummingbirds. This variety, 'Arthur Menzies', was selected here in the Washington Park Arboretum in the early 1960s for its cold hardiness.

BED M Situated at the north entrance of the garden, Bed M features fragrant yellow and copper witch hazels. Bright pink Cyclamen coum blooms below the cinnamon bark of the tall Stewartia (Stewartia monadelpha). Bark, fine structure, white flowers in early summer, and red fall color make this tree a year round knock-out. Sarcococca species throughout the garden offer dark, glossy green foliage and fragrant (though small) flowers. These make a great choice for shady places.