

Bewitching in Winter Witch Hazel
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Interested in adding a splash of color to your fall and winter garden? Try Witch Hazel. Having raked my fair share of its leaves, I will step out on a limb and declare that the deciduous shrub *Hamamelis* (AKA Witch hazel) is, one of the most lovely, interesting and perhaps underrated of plants.

A Native of Eastern North America and Eastern Asia, the *Hamamelis*, is truly a plant for all seasons and according to R.E. Weaver Jr. (formerly of the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University) it is because of the Witch Hazels that there are plants blooming year around in the arboretum. Typically found in woodland areas and woodland margins, Witch Hazels prefer full sun to partial shade and an acidic well-drained soil. They can reach a height of 12-15 feet if pruned into a tree shape. Left naturally, they are vase-shaped and 10-15 feet tall. Magnificent as specimen plants, Witch Hazels are extraordinary in groupings.

Witch Hazels are attractive year round, but let's begin in the fall when their personalities begin to shine. The bright green 4-6" ovate leaves begin to turn bright yellow and shades of gold, orange and red. Once the leaves disappear, axillary clusters remain on bare stems. Keep your eye on these clusters. Depending on the species, beautiful, fragrant and long-lasting yellow, bronze or red spider-like blooms will appear. *H. virginiana* (Common Witch Hazel) is the first to bloom (early Dec) with pale yellow flowers. At the New Year, the bronze flowers of the *H. vernalis* (Vernal Witch Hazel) appear followed by the bright yellow blooms of the Chinese species (*H. mollis*). 'Arnold Promise,' (bright yellow flowers) Diane,' (dark red flowers) 'Jelena,' (coppery orange flowers) and 'Ruby Glow' (coppery red flowers) are among the varieties that are worthy of consideration.

In addition to giving a spectacular fall and winter show, there are many medicinal uses for Witch Hazels: as an astringent and tonic to relieve itching/pain of insect bites and other skin irritations, as an anti-inflammatory and to stop bleeding. The forked limbs of the plant have been used as dowsing tools to find underground water sources. So whether you are looking for an interesting addition to your garden (or searching for water) this bewitching plant will do the trick.