BURNCOOSE NURSERIES PART OF THE CAERHAYS ESTATE

Hamamelis Growing Guide

Introduction

The most popular hamamelis today have flowers which range in colour from yellow to orange and red. The flowers also have a variety of different shapes. The majority are crosses between H. mollis from China and H. japonica from Japan and are correctly referred to as H. x intermedia followed by the cultivar name.

There are two other lesser known species of hamamelis which come from the USA; H. virginiana and H. vernalis. H. virginiana is the only one of the four species which flowers in the autumn.

All hamamelis produce a superb display of autumn colour and the American species are exceptional in this respect.

Positioning And Location

It is sensible to plant hamamelis near a path where the flowers and scent can be appreciated to the full on a dull winter’s day. An evergreen background of holly, yew or laurel will also help show off their (mainly) yellow flowers to best effect.

Witch hazels will grow under a higher tree canopy but they will flower far better, and grow in a less sprawling fashion, if grown in the open.

While the plants are fully frost hardy and can readily tolerate temperatures of minus 20°C the flowers and new growth are not quite as resilient once the sap has begun to rise. Avoid frost pockets at the bottom of slopes or by streams at the valley bottoms. Damage to the new growth by severe late frost can cause bark split but this is unlikely to happen very often in the UK to hamamelis generally.

Full sun is fine for hamamelis providing the soil remains moist and does not dry out in the summer. Otherwise watering may well be needed for the first few years after planting.

Despite all this advice they are not difficult to grow!

Hamamelis 'Aphrodite'

Hamamelis brevipetala

Hamamelis x intermedia 'Orange Beauty'

Hamamelis x intermedia 'Ruby Glow'

Free draining soil which is moisture retentive is ‘perfect’. That is perhaps ‘soil utopia’ so do not be off put and forget that these small trees are not really that fussy. It is perhaps easier to describe what they do not like.

Poor drainage and waterlogged soil is the worst problem whether it is in a heavy clay soil or sandy soil perhaps with sandstone pans.

A pH of 4.5 to 6.5 is ideal. Shallow soils overlaying chalk are a problem which may result in lime-induced chlorosis.

As with any tree or shrub you can readily improve the (already good) chances of your plant growing away successfully by adding compost to

the planting pit and deep mulching the roots in successive years to heighten moisture retention (keep the mulch well below the graft and on no account cover it).

In shallow soils over chalk the application of sequestered iron may overcome the chlorosis problem. In heavier clay soils good soil aeration can be achieved with a fork or you can let the worms in the mulch and compost do this work for you.

Hamamelis are very widely grown in the UK so do not be put off!

Pruning

There is absolutely no need to even consider pruning hamamelis. However, if you do, you may well improve and contain the shape of the tree and encourage it to flower more profusely.

You need always to remove any growth from below the graft as soon as you spot it. These growths from the rootstock are diverting energy from the plant.

It is also beneficial to remove any suckering growth anywhere on the plant. However, after flowering, you may also choose to prune all the previous season’s growth back to two growth buds to achieve an ongoing compact habit.

Propagation

Hamamelis cuttings are hard to root and even harder to overwinter when they do. It is probably not worth the effort!

Grafting is best left to specialist nurseries.

However, you can grow hamamelis from seed, providing you realise that they need a warm period over summer to break down the waxy seed coat, followed by a cold period over winter to ripen the embryo and encourage germination in the second spring after sowing. This can be achieved beside the hot water tank and then in the fridge if you do want to speed

things up! However few of the seedlings are ever likely to have flowers to match the superior grafted plants available to buy today.

Pests And Diseases

I fear this article may have given the impression that witch hazels are difficult to grow. This is not the case.

There are no significant pests and diseases to which they are prone and are generally entirely trouble free once established. Netting rabbit guards for smaller plants may be sensible but hamamelis seem immune to aphid attach or caterpillars.

Few trees could have such an easy write up PROVIDING the location chosen for the plant is suitable as outlined above.

Best Three Hamamelis For Uk Gardens

Our selection of the best three hamamelis to choose for you garden:

H. 'Pallida' – perhaps the best and most popular of any of the yellow flowering forms as its name implies

Hamamelis x intermedia 'Pallida'

H. 'Jelena' – yellow suffused with rich copper-red

Hamamelis x intermedia 'Jelena'

H. 'Rubin' dark red flowers

Hamamelis x intermedia 'Rubin'

Hamamelis x intermedia 'Rubin'

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