

Petasites - Growing Guide

Growing Petasites Japonica

Commonly known as 'Butterbur'

This is an attractive plant to cover a shady damp corner or streamside location which has spectacular flowers appearing with us in January or February before the leaves emerge. We grow it on a bank with poor soil and in full sun where little else other than bamboo seems to thrive.

It is a totally frost hardy rhizomatous plant with a fleshy root system near the top of the soil. In winter the individual male and female plants produce chubby flower heads which emerge unexpectedly from the bare earth. These flowers heads grow eventually to 8-12in and contain dense clusters of yellowish-white flowers surrounded by a spiral floret of small leaves.

The kidney shaped toothed leaves emerge in April when the flowers are over. The leaves can be 2-2½in across and the leaf stalks 2-3ft tall. They create a dense groundcover under which no other weeds are likely to grow which can be a major plus in areas of poor soil. The leaves die down in autumn without the attractive colours you can get with darmeria which grows in a very similar manner. Petasites however originate from Japan, China and Korea where they grow in swampy sites beside streams in moist woodland conditions.

There is no doubt that this is quite an invasive plant but it is very easily controlled and dug up with a spade in the depths of winter. Our plants are all obtained in this way with little effort as the fleshy roots are near the surface.



Petasites japonicus



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