"Favorite Flowers of the Chesapeake Master Gardeners"

Helleborus orientalis by Denise Bennett

Common name: Hellebore or Lenten rose
Family: Ranunculaceae

Photo from February 2020

After having spent most of my life in a USDA Planting Zone 12, hellebores were a new find for me when I moved to Chesapeake in 2008. Trying to get a break that first year from the end of a cold winter and months of bare branches, I attended a Hampton Roads garden show that first spring and hellebores – already blooming – were a prominent feature in several of the displays. I was fascinated by the dark leathery leaf texture and the interesting blooms. I really wanted to add hellebores to my home garden, but I found the price at the retail outlets off-putting, especially since I didn't know anything about how to grow them successfully. I finally found one reasonably priced at a Farmer's Market, and it has been a great addition! Its evergreen foliage is a standout for winter interest and it blooms prolifically beginning in February and continuing into early summer. It does well in my partly sunny front garden tucked in under a loropetalum with pruned lower branches. Its leaves and the pinkish blooms are a nice complement to the loropetalum's coloring.

Hellebores, also commonly called Lenten rose, are non-native to Virginia, but do very well in Zones 4 to 9. They do best when planted in humusy, well-drained soils in part to full shade. They are low maintenance, deer resistant, and will tolerate some poor soils. Hellebores grow in clumps and will have 3 to 4 inch blooms in white, pink or darker rose that begin in late winter and continue blooming for 8-10 weeks. I've noted that the blooms in my plants start out as a light green and evolve into a mauve-pink color, so they have a constantly changing look. Clusters of blooms appear at the tips of the stems and cutting back after blooming will produce new growth/blooms. Hellebores can be propagated by dividing established plants, or through self-seeding. They are typically 1 to 1.5 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.

Photo from April 2020

*<u>All parts of the *helleborus orientalis* are poisonous to humans if ingested</u>.

Photos by Denise Bennett
Resource: Missouri Botanical Gardens / Plant Finder