



Resembling a bouquet of cinnamon sticks, the peeling stems of *Acer griseum* emerge from a billowing mass of *Euonymus fortunei* 'Emerald Gaiety', which is regularly cloud-pruned.

With a wealth of inspiring plant groupings calculated to look their best at this time of year, the Winter Walk at Anglesey Abbey, Cambridgeshire, includes many effective combinations easily replicated at home >>

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SEASON'S MEETINGS

Winter planting

From the time autumn’s winds strip *Acer palmatum* ‘Sango-kaku’ of its gold foliage to reveal the beauty of its coral stems, until the last daffodils retire beneath all-enveloping greenery, ‘winter’ at Anglesey Abbey near Cambridge lasts almost six months. But it is never dull.

Anglesey Abbey’s Winter Walk was conceived in 1996 to mark the centenary of the birth of the first Lord Fairhaven (see panel below). Designed by then Head Gardener, Richard Ayres, and John Sales (then Gardens Adviser to the Trust), the walk was inspired by the smaller-scale Winter Garden at nearby Cambridge University Botanic Garden. The Trust estimated they needed 50 visitors a day to justify opening in winter. Now winter visiting outperforms the rest of the year (a fine day can bring 4,000 people).

Interest abounds

Enclosed by parallel yew hedges, with a mixture of larger trees beyond, the Winter Walk runs roughly south-to-north along the eastern side of the garden. Within a narrow strip about 20m wide by 350m long (22 x 380yd), a sinuous gravel path snakes between deep borders.

Undulating bays of shrubs corral colourful drifts of hellebores, bulbs and other ground cover, punctuated by trees chosen for winter texture – polished *Prunus serrula* and shaggy *Acer griseum*, for example – or bright bark, such as yellow *Salix alba* var. *vitellina* and its ruddier cultivar *S. alba* ‘Britzensis’ (now, due to a bacterial infection known as watermark disease, being replaced by *Tilia cordata* ‘Winter Orange’). Pollarding willows in late spring produces the brightest new shoots; similarly, white-stemmed brambles *Rubus thibetanus* and *R. cockburnianus* are ruthlessly cut to the ground in spring, although the orange swaths of suckering *Cornus sanguinea* ‘Midwinter Fire’ and ‘Winter Beauty’ receive minimal pruning.

White-flowered *Viburnum farreri* ‘Candidissimum’ and pink *V. x bodnantense* ‘Charles Lamont’ bring colour and scent in mild spells between October and March. *Daphne bholua* ‘Jacqueline Postill’ opens strongly scented pink and white flowers in January and February, joining *Chimonanthus praecox* (wintersweet) and various *Hamamelis* (witch hazel). Below, evergreen *Skimmia x confusa* ‘Kew Green’ prefers shade (even dry shade) to sun; its greenish-white flower clusters open in spring.

At the walk’s north end is a grove of dazzling white-barked Himalayan birch, *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*. Its original underplanting, black-stemmed *Cornus alba* ‘Kesselringii’, could not compete with the birches’ shallow roots. Now a leafmould mulch provides a dark backdrop, broken in spring, when thousands of *Tulipa* ‘Little Beauty’ bedeck it with pink stars, and in autumn, as birches scatter golden confetti.

Originally the Winter Walk ended here, but the path was extended, creating a circuit where drifts of snowdrops (*Galanthus*) and winter aconites (*Eranthis*) can be admired. Naturalised from large-scale plantings probably made in the 1850s and 1960s, many flowered for the first time in decades when light flooded in after 4,000 trees were lost to Dutch elm disease. Several excellent new *Galanthus* cultivars were discovered, including *G. nivalis* ‘Anglesey Abbey’; a special collection of these and other choice snowdrops is open by appointment.

Although few gardeners have room for a winter border, a small corner, or even a large pot can house a colourful grouping of plants to bring delight when herbaceous borders are drab. For winter planting inspiration, nowhere is better than Anglesey Abbey. ●

GARDEN VISITING DETAILS
Anglesey Abbey Gardens, Quay Road, Lode, Cambridge CB25 9EJ; 01223 810080; www.nationaltrust.org.uk/angleseyabbey
❖ This is an RHS Partner Garden: for more partner gardens to visit see: www.rhs.org.uk/partnergardens

Anglesey Abbey’s past

Founded in 1236 as an Augustinian priory and dissolved 300 years later by Henry VIII, Anglesey Abbey was later owned by various families – one resident, horse-dealer Thomas Hobson (1544-1631), was the origin of the phrase ‘Hobson’s choice’.
In 1848 the house was bought by Rev John Hailstone then, from 1926 onward, the first Lord Fairhaven and his brother Henry enlarged it into a comfortable country house, sensitively retaining many medieval features. Lord Fairhaven died in 1966, leaving the property, its extensive art collections and furnishings to the National Trust.



RICHARD BLOOM



Winter’s thrills

- 1 Blanketed in snow and ablaze with orange and red dogwood thickets, amid ghostly tangles of ornamental brambles, the Winter Walk winds between hedges and trees.
- 2 Soft pink Lenten roses (*Helleborus x hybridus*) nod below thorny, ‘whitewashed’ canes of *Rubus thibetanus*.
- 3 A rug of black-leaved *Ophiopogon planiscapus* ‘Nigrescens’ spreads beneath glowing *Cornus sanguinea* ‘Winter Beauty’.
- 4 Beside a white-stemmed *Rubus cockburnianus*, *Pulmonaria rubra* bears warm red flowers among fresh green, unspotted foliage, even in deep winter.
- 5 The papery new bark of *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*, blushing soft orange-pink, is an effective foil for a carpet of *Cyclamen hederifolium* Silver-leaved Group.



Mixed doubles

- 6 Broad, glossy leaves of *Bergenia* ‘Sunningdale’, tinged red by winter’s chill, make a striking contrast with the marbled arrowheads of *Arum italicum* subsp. *italicum* ‘Marmoratum’.
- 7 Acid-yellow *Luzula sylvatica* ‘Aurea’ is a good setting for *Galanthus* ‘Hobson’s Choice’, one of the garden’s new cultivars.
- 8 Pale yellow-green flowers of *Ribes laurifolium* sparkle against the dark backdrop provided by a vigorous mat of *Vinca minor* foliage.
- 9 A pollarded golden willow, *Salix alba* var. *vitellina*, makes a dramatic sight amid a cluster of glossy-leaved *Mahonia aquifolium* ‘Apollo’.

