

Cost of the winter

The winter just passed has not been kind to the more tender plants in our gardens. Some plants are expected to die, even in a mild winter. Other survive until we have a winter such as the last. Losses at Bredon Springs have been heavy and are a warning of the risks one runs when one relies too much on plants from warmer climates.

It is also instructive to observe the value of even slight protection in this matter of plant life and death. A covering of snow will prevent dessication by cold drying winds and a shrub that has fallen over may survive under a layer of snow when its sister, remaining upright may be cut to the ground.

For many years I have relied on hebes and I have often said that given a mild winter there is not a day in the year when hebes were not in flower. I have photographs of *speciosa* hybrids in full bloom on New Year's day 1973. Today not a *speciosa* hybrid remains alive. That was to be expected, for they are the more tender of the genus. Great Orme and Midsummer beauty, usually considered fairly hardy have, however, gone down this year and the resulting gaps are great. Not until a large shrub dies does one realise the space it occupied. Surprisingly, *Hebe macrantha*, *H. hulkeana* and *H. cupressoides* are almost undamaged although I suspect that the two first may have lost their flower buds for this year.

The hebe relatives *Parahebe catarractae* and *P. hookeriana* are severely or slightly damaged depending on the amount of protection provided. Usually they would be considered fully hardy

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here. *Ribes speciosa*, the Californian Fuchsia flowered gooseberry is often regarded as tender but in spite of the fact that it breaks into leaf in the middle of winter it suffered only the slightest scorch and is now leafing well and is already showing flower buds. This shrub should be more widely grown, for few things are more elegant when in flower, the crimson pendant flowers looking more like fuchsias than gooseberry flowers.

The olearias or New Zealand daisy bushes include few hardy species and many that survive normal winters in sheltered sites. *Olearia haastii* is fully hardy in the Midlands and, as would be expected, is undamaged this year, but *O. scillonensis* which has survived almost every winter for the last 30 years here is killed outright even where well protected. *O. lineata* is also a total casualty. Other species, notably *O. macrodonta*, *O. oleifolia* and *O. gunniana* are damaged but not killed. Fortunately both olearias and hebes are easily rooted and young plants overwintered in frames quickly establish when planted out and flower at an early age.

The buddleias usually grown are quite hardy but a few very desirable species are more tender and I am sorry to have lost *B. auriculata* without having taken the precaution of overwintering young stock under glass. This will not be easy to replace. *B. crispa* has probably survived but has been damaged quite severely. The perfume of these two shrubs makes them very desirable things to have around. The evergreen *B. glo-*

bosa has lost quite a lot of leaves in many gardens but I think it will live.

I would think that few *ceanothus* will be left alive. We have few of them here, in fact I never replaced the 1963 losses of these shrubs, but going around other gardens I see many dead, and nothing looks deader than a dead *ceanothus*.

For years we have grown many fuchsias outdoors, even the so-called greenhouse varieties. They get cut to the ground each year but always break from below ground in the spring. Will they do it again this year? I am fairly confident but some losses will probably occur on the younger plants. *F. magellanica* and the variety *riccartonii* should survive but may be cut back considerably. I expect that there will be many fuchsia hedges in the South-West which will have to start again from the bottom this year.

Itea illicifolia, that attractive evergreen with leaves a little like holly and pendant "catkins" in the late summer can be expected to have suffered some injury but I think my specimen will recover. Similarly the various *cistus* found the winter less pleasant than in their Mediterranean home country but total losses are few. Here again, reserve stocks wintered under glass will make replacement easy. And replace we must for few things are more beautiful in the early summer than their crumpled paper-like flowers. *Griselinia littoralis*, a New Zealander that is often thought of as being tender, has hardly lost a leaf and its fresh undamaged foliage of bright light green is particularly welcome in this colourless Spring.



A *Hebe speciosa* hybrid, one of the winter's casualties.