



Garden Designer Gillian Goodson embraces the magic of Christmas

Ding. Dong! There may seem to be no escape from the countdown to Christmas but forget preparations for a few minutes and lose yourself in what nature is offering – look out the window and be entranced by the changing landscape as nature moves to its darker side.

While reflecting on whether you've been naughty or nice and what the jolly bearded wonder might bring, consider *Ilex aquifolium* 'Argentea Marginata' (female, silver-margined holly) for full sun or partial shade. Growing up to 12m, this topical evergreen tree is adorned with juicy red berries like a thousand kisses from November onwards.

One of the first Christmas (or Lenten) roses to flower is *Helleborus purpurascens* – a treat of green and purple flushed flowers (December to March). Intriguing marbled leaves and available from December is red-flowered *H.* 'Anna's Red'; named after delightful plantswoman, Anna Pavord. Looking for a gift idea? Book a spot for you and a friend on one of her talks or be enthralled by her books. For a light pink option try



Ilex aquifolium 'Argentea Marginata' and its juicy red berries

H. 'Penny's Pink'. An understated, non-fussy favourite of mine with dark green leathery foliage is *H. niger*. A wonderful edge of the woodland choice with star-shaped white flowers that pick up the softer winter light – plant near the lesser known *Betula albosinensis* 'Fascination' (Chinese red-barked birch to 12m), which has white bark at maturity and peeling sheets of blush cinnamon.

As mistletoe madness takes hold embrace the merriment and joy of the season and all the good it embodies. Here's to eating a belly-full and sucking in our tummies as we reach for another mince pie while trying to squeeze into that new outfit.

Protect non-hardy plants from frost, put food and water out for birds, prevent ponds from freezing, harvest winter cabbages, sprouting broccoli, leeks, Brussels sprouts; move deciduous trees/shrubs if necessary; check stored bulbs/corms for disease, avoid walking on frozen lawns and prune established fruit trees. Gather young eucalyptus leaves, winterberries, ivy and holly, cinnamon, pinecones and whatever else the magpie in you might spy and make a wreath or garland, or just make a mess and have fun!

Here's also to absent loved ones, laughter, new encounters and to not knowing what magic is around the corner. May your heart dance and your feet find their rhythm – wherever you find yourself this Christmas, may the stars shine for you!

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