

GARDENING

WINTER BLOOMS

Transform your garden into an inviting, lockdown-friendly space, says *Randle Siddeley*

As we face a socially distanced winter, more of us are looking to our gardens to yield up an outdoor room. I'm inspired by what can be done, having just transformed a Belgravia courtyard into a cosy jewel box. To give the impression of a room, I erected a slender iron pergola around heirloom-quality, and reassuringly expensive, American outdoor furniture from McKinnon and Harris (every frame guaranteed for a lifetime). I planted around it and suspended heat strips from the top. Into a green wall I built a barbecue, sink, worktop and fridge – even in winter, white wine and vodka need chilling.

There is no reason for any winter garden to look bedraggled. Ornamental grasses, seed heads and trees come alive in wintry, pale, gold light. Silver birch bark curls and flakes, adding a delicate sense of fragility. The prettiest birch is the exotic Chinese red birch *Betula albosinensis* 'Pink Champagne'. Thistle heads add spiky sculptural drama and *Eryngium yuccifolium* has a creamy bloom on a long stem that glows



Pennisetums add luminous colour and texture to a winter garden



ABOVE AND LEFT: Festive red berries are must-haves at Christmas; dahlias are making a comeback



Garden designer and landscape architect, Randle Siddeley

in the light, similar to the small globe thistle *Echinops ritro* Veitch's Blue. The fuzzy, caterpillar-like heads of *Pennisetums* also add silvery luminosity.

Hydrangeas' russet, papery heads add warmth and I always enjoy watching the slightly conical *paniculata* type turn from white to pinky green and then to a crispy brown. Never cut them back till April, just as they're about to produce new shoots, and they'll work for you all the year round.

By November you should have planted your spring bulbs but it's not too late for wallflowers, which, like dahlias, are having a comeback. The great splodges of luscious colour they offer will draw the eye even to the gloomiest corners. Sarah Raven (*sarahraven.com*) sells wallflowers potted and garden-ready so grab your trowel and start digging. Be generous – plant them in big clusters of at least 12 and not more than 20mm apart.

Their names alone make me yearn for May's festive colours – *Erysimum Ruby Gem*, *Sugar Rush*, *Sunset Orange* and *Rich Velvet*. There's even a sumptuous crimson perennial called *Erysimum Bowles Mauve* that flowers all year.

Finally, it's just not Christmas without mistletoe, pine cones and berries so plant plenty of holly and seek out mistletoe lurking in a tree. You want holly with gleaming dark leaves and thick clusters of plump berries, so choose *Ilex meserveae Blue Angel* or *Ilex aquifolium Alaska*. The robins will be happy, too. randlesiddeley.co.uk ■