



Daphne 'Jim's Pride' is a highly-recommended cross between *D. transatlantica* and *D. collina*. It grows well in a variety of environments and has large, great-smelling white flowers all summer long.



Daphne x *burkwoodii* 'Carol Mackie' has pretty, variegated leaves, blooms in early summer and adapts well to a variety of conditions, including cold and drought.



Daphne odora 'Marginata', commonly known as winter daphne or fragrant daphne, is the most widely-grown type of daphne.



"It is little surprise that discerning gardeners are rarely without at least one daphne in their collection."

— UK Plantsman Robin White,
Daphnes: A Practical Guide for Gardeners, Timber Press, 2006

Easy to love

These *Daphne* cultivars require little care and offer distinctive looks, an intoxicating scent and year-round interest

Daphne cneorum — known as rock daphne or rose daphne — blooms starting in April and was still in bloom at Simnitt Nursery in November. Due to its very small stature (12 inches tall, spreading to 3-4 feet wide) it's a good choice for rock gardens. It has a fantastic daphne fragrance.

By Elizabeth Petersen

No wonder people go gaga for daphne.

Late in the dormant season, when gardeners' senses are starved for inspiration, the amazing winter-flowering daphne (*Daphne odora* and its cultivars) gives us fragrance — and, oh, what a fragrance. Few would dispute its appeal.

But daphne has a reputation. Is it a finicky prima donna, liable to kick off for no apparent reason? Does it require coddling?

Not at all, according to landscape designer Roger Miller, of Homescaper,

LLC who frequently specifies daphne in his designs.

"Daphne is very popular and for good reasons," he said. "It's a really good garden plant. The genus has plenty of qualities to recommend it, and every homeowner should have one up near the house where they can enjoy it. The blooms are packed with fragrance and the foliage is beautiful. Plants tend to bloom for a long period, re-bloom or spread out the bloom over a very long season.

"My clients request fragrance, an evergreen presence and, most of all, low maintenance, and daphne is close to four-star in all of them."

Chris Steinke of Youngblood Nursery, in Salem, Ore., which grows several daphne species and cultivars, agreed.

"There's nothing more impressive than daphne for winter fragrance and a profusion of flowers, and it's possible to have daphne in bloom in every season," he said. "Some will bloom once per year, while others will start blooming in early spring and re-bloom clear into the late fall."

Since the diverse genus includes plants that are very small to almost

Picks from the PROS

It isn't hard to get growers to talk about plants. The tough part is getting them to narrow down their list of favorites to just a handful. Here are some of the varieties our sources recommended:

Chris Steinke
Youngblood Nursery
Salem, Ore.

Lokta daphne or paper daphne (*Daphne bholua*) – This deciduous daphne has a fabulous fragrance that you can smell from a block away. It grows up to 8 feet tall and blooms



in early-to-late winter, depending on the weather. Easy to grow, it makes an excellent background plant. It is known as lokta or paper daphne because, in its native Nepal, the bark is used for making paper.

Creeping milkwort or chapparral pea

(*Polygala chamaebuxus* 'Kamniski') – This cool, low-growing evergreen plant forms a stunning carpet of purple and yellow, sweet-pea-like flowers very early, usually in February.



Tasmanian pepper bush (*Drimys lanceolata*)



– This attractive evergreen thrives in bright shade! Its beautiful, bright-red stems hold narrow, 3-inch leathery leaves, copper-red as they emerge, and turning green as they age. The shrub grows rather slowly to 6 feet.

Oriental paper bush (*Edgeworthia chrysantha*) – This relative of the daphne plant bears fragrant, bright yellow flowers on bare stems in mid-to-late winter. The bark on this deciduous plant is an attractive reddish brown color, and the medium green leaves are large and tropical-looking. It grows to 5 feet in height and width.



Jerry Simnitt
Simnitt Nursery
Canby, Ore.

Pieris japonica 'Little Heath' – This compact-growing pieris is easy to grow, and is ideal for smaller landscape spaces. It has white flowers and variegated foliage. New growth is light red. Zone 5.



Daphne x burkwoodii 'Carol Mackie'

– Although this is an older variety, it is still hard to beat the showy fragrant flowers in the spring and the lush variegated foliage in the summer. Both drought and cold hardy. Zone 4.



Rhododendron myrtifolium – This

compact growing rhododendron is underused, and ideal for tight spaces. It offers year round interest. It blooms with small, light-pink flowers in late May. Then, in the fall and winter, its foliage turns bronze-red. Zone 5.



Daphne tangutica – This is an evergreen daphne with dark green waxy leaves. The fragrant flowers begin with lavender buds and then open to light pink. The flowers are very fragrant and have the added benefit of producing red berries in late summer. Grows to 5 feet tall and wide. Zone 6.



Rock daphne (*Daphne cneorum*) – This is a well known plant, but it should be used more due to its dark, evergreen foliage and fragrant hot pink flowers. If planted in the correct place, it can handle very dry conditions and extreme cold. Stays small, only growing to 1 foot by 3 feet.



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Daphne transatlantica cultivars, formerly known as Daphne caucasica, are known for their rugged adaptability to a variety of conditions.

large, some evergreen and others deciduous, they fill many design needs in the garden.

“Their compact size makes daphne plants a good option for close to the house, where they won't overwhelm the windows or entry,” said Miller. “Daphne plants fit into the smaller size landscape. Since most stay small (3-6 feet tall and wide), it is easy to find a place for one in almost any garden.”

The lower, wider shrubs fit beneath windows or lend evergreen or structural presence to the border, and the larger, upright plants lend a delicate aesthetic beneath trees.

The care and handling of daphne

A major selling point is that daphnes are easy-care plants.

“Anyone can grow *Daphne odora*,” said Miller. “Daphne can fend for themselves for the most part. They don't need pruning and they won't outgrow their spaces.”

His advice: “The less care, the better; especially in summer, avoid too much water.”

Jerry Simnitt, co-owner of Simnitt



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CURT KIPP

Daphne × *transatlantica* 'Summer Ice', shown here growing at Youngblood Nursery, is a favorite of many designers. It flowers from spring through fall with very fragrant pale pink flowers, and has lovely white-and-green, variegated foliage.

Nursery in Canby, Ore., grows an assortment of *Daphne* cultivars. “The hardest part is what the grower does: rooting, transplanting and getting plants to retail,” he said.

In his view, the reputation of daphne shrubs as fragile can compromise their long-term survival more than anything.

“People hear that daphne is finicky, so sometimes they try too hard to take good care of them, but daphne prefer to be left alone,” Simnitt said. “The plants are extremely hardy and super drought-tolerant when established. The deciduous ones can take conditions down to minus 30.”

Steinke agreed.

“To place a daphne in clay and/or wet soil is sure death, and killing them with kindness – too much water – happens all too often,” he said. “Proper site conditioning and placement make all the difference. Daphne plants need very well-drained, but moist, soils.

“For success with daphne, do your site prep properly, don’t over water, and stick with hybrid varieties for best success. Hybrid varieties are

bred to have the best of both parents, so they have a better chance of surviving not-so-ideal conditions and often flower more.”

The shrubs should be watered “on a slow drip to ensure a deep root system, which daphne need to thrive,” Steinke said.

Availability of daphne

Only a handful of Oregon growers focus on producing daphne. “It’s a small niche market,” Simnitt said.

Of the many varieties in the genus, few are commercially available, but that may change. Selections with more landscape uses are gradually finding their way onto the market.

“Daphne sell themselves when they are in bloom,” Simnitt said.

That, however, limits the time of year growers can ship them. They tend to perform better in the ground than in a container, so Simnitt Nursery grows all daphnes in the field and field digs them into containers for sale. Some larger sizes are also available B&B.

Youngblood Nursery, a leading Oregon daphne grower, lists 19 varieties in its 2009 catalog.

Famous for fragrance

The winter or fragrant daphne (*Daphne odora*), especially the variegated form ‘Marginata’, also known as ‘Aureomarginata’, is “by far the most well known and widely grown cultivar,” according to Steinke. Its pink buds appear in January and open to light pink flowers in February and March.

“The aroma of sweet citrus is so thick that on warmer days it can envelop a neighborhood,” Steinke said. Leathery foliage is evergreen.

D. o. ‘Zuiko Nishiki’ flowers for a longer period, with flowers similar to ‘Marginata’ starting in February and continuing through April. “The scent can be noticed 20 feet away” from this evergreen shrub with golden margins on the foliage, Steinke said.

‘Rebecca’ and ‘Mae Jima’ they are “odora types that flower in winter with pink buds opening to pale pink-white flowers,” said Steinke. “They have superior variegation compared to ‘Marginata’.”

D. odora selections prefer protection from hot afternoon sun and are wider than they are tall, about 3-4’ tall and 4-6’ wide.

Best all around

D. transatlantica (formerly *D. caucasica*) “does well in more locations and is more adaptable” than other *Daphne* selections, according to Simnitt. “It is least finicky, develops the nicest root structure, blooms all summer and doesn’t require pruning,” he said.

Simnitt isn’t alone in this opinion. The cultivar ‘Jim’s Pride’ was recommended by every source interviewed for this article. A hybrid between *D. caucasica* and *D. collina*, it has large, rich green foliage and white, extremely fragrant flowers.

The cultivar ‘Summer Ice’ is a “great one,” according to designer Roger Miller. He specifies it more than any other daphne. Valued for its variegated foliage and fragrant, pale pink flowers, this evergreen choice has a long flowering period, spring through fall.

“‘Summer Ice’ is always in demand,” Steinke noted. Youngblood Nursery is increasing production of it.

Simnitt predicted that the new ‘Eternal Fragrance’, bred by U.K. plantsman Robin White, will hit the mass market in 3-4 years. This selection, which still has limited availability, is more compact with a heavier bloom than others, he said.

White described it as having a “neat, bushy habit,” and dark green leaves that are shorter and narrower



CURT KLIPP

Daphne ‘Lawrence Crocker’ is a small-statured hybrid (*D. arbucula* × *D. colina*) from the garden of Lawrence Crocker, one of the founders of the Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery in Medford, Ore. Growing to just 12 inches tall and wide, it bears fragrant lavender flowers from spring to fall.



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than 'Jim's Pride' and the spring flush of flower is more generous than that of 'Jim's Pride.'

Miller likes this small one (2.5 feet wide and tall) for the front of a border, where its tighter, rounded habit and fragrant ongoing bloom can be appreciated. 'Eternal Fragrance' is available from Youngblood Nursery in #5 containers and will be available in #2's next season.

Fabulous foliage and bloom

Selections of *D. × burkwoodii*

are also highly regarded and popular. According to Steinke, 'Briggs Moonlight,' 'Carol Mackie' and 'Somerset' are "wonderful plants" and easy to grow, forming compact mounds that bloom in early summer.


'Briggs Moonlight' has striking yellow foliage with green margins, and Simnitt Nursery is building its stock to meet demand.

'Carol Mackie' is "about as hardy as they come," said Steinke.

According to Simnitt, "(This) pretty summer plant with variegation takes

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Daphne mantensiana 'Manten' was created in 1941 by Jack Manten. A cross between *Daphne × burkwoodii* 'Somerset' and *Daphne retusa*, this evergreen has become an enduring favorite. It has clusters of orchid-purple flowers throughout the year and grows to about 2 feet.

“For success with daphne, do your site prep properly, don’t over water, and stick with hybrid varieties for best success”.

Chris Steinke
Youngblood Nursery
Salem, Ore.

harsher conditions than others, including cold and drought.”

One of a kind

Daphne ‘Lawrence Crocker’ (*D. arbuscula* × *D. collina*) is an excellent plant. Steinke called it “one of the finest garden plants we have come across.” Dark green, glossy, evergreen foliage forms a 12-15-inch mound with fragrant, lavender flowers. “It is a seemingly perpetual bloomer from spring through fall and is always in demand,” he said.

Daphne × ‘Kilmeston’ PP 18361 is a new dwarf selection offered by Youngblood Nursery. The low growing plant (1 foot by 2 feet) has bluish-gray foliage and a bushy habit. Pink flowers start in April, and after a period of new growth a much more prolific period of flowering occurs in June through September, Steinke said. He recom-

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mends that gardeners avoid overhead watering, site it in well draining soil and protect it from temperatures below 10 degrees.

Early bloomers

The deciduous February daphne (*D. mezereum*) starts blooming in January before leaves appear, with intensely fragrant lilac-purple flowers up and down the bare stems. Red berries appear later. Simnitt Nursery propagates this plant, the second smallest of those it grows, by seed.

Smallest

Rock daphne (*D. cneorum*) is the smallest daphne grown commercially at Simnitt Nursery, and the one grown in the largest numbers. The prostrate evergreen plant gets about 12 inches tall, but can spread to 3 feet or more, so it is popular for use in rock gardens. It produces flowers starting in April and it was still in bloom at the nursery in November last year.

The tough evergreen plant is popular in Canada, including British and Ontario, Simnitt said. *Daphne cneorum* grows and flowers best when planted in full sun, in soil that is well drained.

Biggest

D. bholua is the largest daphne, a later winter bloomer that can grow to 20 feet in its native Nepal (more like 8 feet in the Pacific Northwest), with long, narrow evergreen foliage and pale pink, extremely fragrant flowers.

A note of caution

If there's one drawback with daphne, it's that all parts of the plants are poisonous, especially the berries. They can look very tempting, so plant with care where small children may be around. ☺

Elizabeth Petersen writes for gardeners and garden businesses, coaches students and writers, and tends a one-acre garden in West Linn, Ore. She can be reached at gardenwrite@comcast.net

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