

*Text Simone Collet / Photo Bernard Villat*

## **The black Hellebore -a rose for Christmas**

**When the flowers of our gardens have faded, the corolla of the black hellebore finally blossoms - a miraculous star lighting up the desolate earth with grace.**

In the productive family of the **Ranunculaceae**, the hellebores comprise some species which we rarely notice. Who cares about the evil Hellebore? The green Hellebore? The Winter aconite? The white Hellebore? Not many people you will certainly agree.....

However, there is one who brings all the beauty to our eyes and is unanimously appreciated: it is the black hellebore (*Helleborus niger*). Known especially under the pretty name “Christmas rose”, it brings to our gardens with a grace and a poetry like no other with its pretty white corolla hemmed with mauve or pink. Today one can even find varieties with yellow, pink, green, purple or red corolls.



*In the heart of winter, the miracle of a black hellebore blooming every year for Christmas*

### **An Alpine origin**

In the icy kingdom of the very rare winter flowers, it is necessary to have a plant native of the Alpine summits, to be able to resist the attacks of the climate of the most rigorous months of the year. Unfortunately, even in its original Alpine cradle, the black hellebore tends to become rare and is now on the list of protected species.

A temperature of -15 degrees Celsius does not scare our brave plant! You will, however, help it by gallantly covering its base with straw.

### **Growing the hellebore in the garden**

The black hellebore can be planted as early as November. As our plant fears the heat, choose a place protected from direct sun light. A shadowy place with only

morning or evening will perfectly suit this plant. Do not expose it to full wind, but shelter it with a low wall or a shrub with leaves so to protect it from the attacks of the “bise” (cold and dry wind).

The quality of the soil is obviously important. This plant enjoys a moist and slightly sandy soil. You can enrich the soil with your compost or potting soil for flowering perennials. Before planting do not hesitate to dip down the root ball into water. Take care to separate the plants by about 30 cm to allow the roots to grow. Water the plants generously, then try to never move them again, because the black hellebore does not like moving.

Their maintenance is easy: You will only have to remove the withered or stained leaves or those in excess and you also have to remove the faded flowers, when necessary, which will stimulate the appearance of new blossoms.

It is in the garden that the Christmas rose finds the habitat that best suits it, but it can also be grown in a planter for the terrace or potted for the balcony, providing, however, some fertilizer.

### **Waiting for the flowering**

You will then have to master an understandable impatience because, after planting, you will have to wait two years to see the first blossoming. But what a bloom!

“Everything comes to those who wait” says the proverb. It is indeed a wonderful bouquet that will spring from the ground in the heart of winter and will reward your patience. Better yet, your Christmas rose will bloom faithfully every winter and will delight you for many years, like a real gift of heaven.

### **Precaution**

“Once the black hellebore was used for black magic and its seeds were used to fight madness. But be aware, this beautiful plant is toxic: It is for your eyes’ pleasure only!