

# Winter Scent

**Sean Barton, head gardener at Henbury Hall with a Christmas Box for every garden.**

If you are going to flower in the depths of winter with so few pollinators, you really need a trick up your sleeve.

The genus *Sarcococca* comes with intoxicating perfume that drifts on the air and always has you looking for the source. I have a slight obsession with *Sarcococca* or "Christmas Box" as it's commonly known. It's very underrated in my opinion and I think it's because it's planted in less than ideal conditions, often in full sun/awful soil by so-called Landscapers. It sits there looking chlorotic with no clue to its real potential. In my own garden, in shade and rich, edaphic soil, the best variety – *hookeriana* v. *digyna* – is a thing of great beauty throwing

up mahogany/purple willow stems and long, lanceolate leaves to three feet and beyond and in December/January, covered in delicious, scented blooms.

Less common and slightly more tender is *S. wallichii*, an exotic, large leaved evergreen that starts flowering as early as October. *S. balansae* is a big species from Thailand which I have yet to test outdoors. Another scented treasure is *Narcissus paperwhite* which here at Henbury Hall, we start with as soon as they are available, staggering them to keep a supply going for the house. Always in terracotta pots with lichen covered twigs collected from the garden for support. Garden canes are never used as they look so unnatural and stiff. We force the *Narcissus* in gentle heat but if needed for an event, they can be put into the warmth of the Orchid House to speed them up.

We have many Orchids to tide us over the gloom of winter. *Dendrobium delicatum* produces lots of honey-scented, ivory blossoms. It's a tough, vigorous beauty (by orchid standards) and could easily be grown on a large windowsill with good light. Hopefully, we'll have some available on our plant stall in July 2016. It can even withstand a cold winter which induces flowers. I'm going to trial one in an unheated section of the greenhouse to see what happens. A specimen was given to a friend of the family



and was reported back as being covered in flowers. Most annoying as ours didn't flower so well that year!

Another species - *Bulbophyllum graveolens* – also blooms here in the winter. With mustard coloured blooms and a ruby red lip, the scent is a cross between blue cheese and wet Alsatian; definitely not one for the house!



**Narcissus Paperwhite, a scented treasure.**



What do you get if you cross blue cheese with a wet Alsatian? Answer: *Bulbophyllum graveolens*