



# MASTER GARDENER

## COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

### Year Round Gardening

## **Hellebores, A Welcome Spring Bloom!**

Fredricka Bogardus, Colorado Master Gardener

**“In the spring, I have counted 136 different kinds of weather inside of 24 hours.”**  
— *Mark Twain*

Our spring weather is unpredictable. For those of us who anxiously await the onset of the gardening season, spring is full of hope and disappointment. There are few reliable, very early bloomers that can help the gardener make it through our spring without despair.

One such garden hero is the Hellebore (*Helleborus orientale*), also called Lenten rose because blooms frequently appear during the season of Lent, or in February and March. These evergreen members of the buttercup family are a great addition to the perennial garden for both flowers and foliage.

Starting early, sometimes emerging from the snow, the blooms are long lasting, often spanning a couple of months. They are resistant to damage from late frosts and even snowfalls. The flowers growing on stems 8-9 inches tall, range from white to purple, with yellow stamens. Leathery evergreen leaves, with spiny margins make this an interesting ground cover plant that will continue growing through the summer into autumn.



*Photo courtesy of Fredricka Bogardus*

Hellebores thrive in well-drained soil with a neutral pH. They prefer to grow in shade, although early morning sun may increase plant vigor, they will even tolerate dry shade conditions. They benefit from an application of a slow release fertilizer, in spring and autumn. The plants are hardy to zone 4 (minimum temperature -30°F), so are well suited to the Pikes Peak Region

Hellebores are highly toxic. Greek legend has it that Odysseus poisoned his arrows with hellebore toxin. No part of this plant should be ingested. Because of this toxicity they are deer and rabbit resistant.

Hellebores do reseed, seedlings may vary in flower color, and appearance from the parent plants. Seedlings will bloom after about two years of growth. While it is not necessary for the plant's health, you can divide the plants if you wish to reproduce the exact plant that you have. Division should be performed in autumn.

Generally, plants are purchased to start hellebores. Buy your plants at a nursery or garden center. Plant shallow, so that the crown (where the root joins the stem) is at ground level, and definitely not more than one inch deep. Hellebores can be started from seed, but that is challenging.

This plant will delight you from late winter through the summer and autumn,

*When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research-based answers. Get answers to your horticulture questions by visiting [ask.extension.org](http://ask.extension.org) any time day or night. Follow the El Paso County Master Gardeners on [www.facebook.com/ColoradoMasterGardeners.EPC/](https://www.facebook.com/ColoradoMasterGardeners.EPC/). Classes and other events can be found at <https://elpaso.extension.colostate.edu/>.*