

The Scents of the Season

A bloodhound may be able to follow a scent with his cold nose but, due to science and sinuses, people noses are not effective in cold spaces. That is quite reason enough to have lovely fragrances inside during the winter months. This time of year a hyacinth bulb is worth its weight in smiles.

There are people who insist upon cutting a Virginia cedar from along old property lines just to have that nostalgic juniper perfume in their homes for the holidays. Its fan shaped fronds create a ski-jump for ornaments but the smell is richer than that of pine or fir. Just as different people see colors differently (and you know as you look around, that they surely must) they sniff odors differently. I have met people who find the fragrance of boxwood unpleasant and other who find lilies too funereal for a bouquet. Then there are those of us who will pull out an old recipe and cook just to have a familiar fragrance in the kitchen!

Once the holidays are over and the old and familiar and the new and shiny treasures have been tucked away for next December, the house suddenly looks too plain, too neat. It needs the presence of leaf and flower in lieu of spring. It needs houseplants. Perhaps it is the decades of frequent moving but I have little experience with houseplants. To be honest, I have killed a lot of them. An enormous *Dracaena* is near the windowed front door facing east. That exposure must account for its robust health. The leaves are long and striped in white. I have not fertilized it fearing that if she gets much bigger she will require a room of her own. I do water it with water that has been 'airing' a while as I have read that 'city' water can brown the tips of the leaves.

Dracaena or corn plant can bloom after years of just being there but that can be a mixed blessing as the small bursts of flowers on long stalks are said to be sufficiently strong scented to attract moths from fields away. Selecting plants for fragrance is not a sure thing. Years ago I ordered a fothergilla shrub because I had once lived next door to one that smelled heavenly. Mine is lovely in bloom with brilliant fall color but has only a dim fragrance. Carolina allspice, *Calycanthus florida*, is another charmer that may have either a strong or weak fragrance. Seven son flower, *Heptacodium miconioides* is fragrant in a Mathews garden, not in mine.

Garden flowers can be successfully grown inside but some of the most fragrant do not have brilliant blooms. Others wait for evening before sharing their fragrance, as do moonflowers, nicotiana, and four-o'clocks. Foliage can provide scents and an inside herb garden can be a useful delight. Lemon grass, *Cymbopogon citratus*, used in Asian cooking, can freshen the air. Geraniums, Pelargoniums, make great houseplants if you have a place that is bright but not too hot and dry. The flowers are spectacular but for many gardeners it is the splendid variety of the aromatic foliage that is the reason to have them.

Holiday gift plants often include miniature roses and small azaleas. Enjoy them while they last. Azaleas may be difficult to adapt to replanting outside in spring and roses prefer to be outside unless you can treat these queens royally in a greenhouse or conservatory. If the deluge of catalogs has enticed you to make lists of roses it may be time to investigate the language used for their relative fragrance. Roses have been crossed with older varieties to regain their traditional bouquets but some may still be disappointing in a specific garden.

The roses most appealing for fragrance may not be those most suited to your garden's climate but a few famed for their rich perfumes are: 'Felicite Parmentier', an alba spring bloomer; 'Mme Isaac Pereire', large Bourbon shrub, rebloomer; Margaret Merrill', short white

floribunda; 'New Dawn', old-fashioned pink climber; 'Perfume Delight', deep pink hybrid tea; 'Apothecary's Rose' Gallica, petals retain fragrance when dried; 'The Prince' a David Austin red-magenta; 'Zephirine Drouhin' a spring blooming deep rose climber. I only have two of these: Margaret Merril has not been especially fragrant in my garden but Zephirine Drouhin has and she is thornless! A bonus!