

I don't know when I agreed to write about Mahonias and I only currently grow one; the most common clone, *Mahonia x media* 'Charity'. As I am writing Storm Eunice is blowing at its height and my poor shrub, sited in a passage between my house and the neighbouring one, is bearing the brunt of the wind. However it is one of the most hardy winter-flowering shrubs and I expect it to survive – it is normally hardy to -15 C. It has bright shiny dark green, evergreen leaves and racemes of bright yellow flowers in winter (just going over now) and together with *Viburnum* 'Dawn' provides some winter colour higher up than the ground level snowdrops and hellebores we rely on at this least cheerful time of year. This plant is a cross between *M. lomariifolia* and *M. japonica*, both from the Far East, and is the most popular clone grown as it is easy to grow, is very hardy and tolerates shade. There are newer clones available such as 'Buckland', 'Lionel Fortescue' (AGM) and 'Winter Sun' (AGM) but this one is the most available. I know it is a shrub rather than the perennials we should write about here, but it is a very suitable plant to grow in the back row of a perennial border and the shiny evergreen leaves make a good backing. They are also scented, though I have never noticed the scent

*Mahonia japonicum* is another Mahonia I used to grow and it suckered in the front garden though I am not sure whether I yanked it out or it departed of its own accord. It is a native of the west coast of North America.

Another recent cultivar of Mahonia is a much smaller, non-prickly variety that was Chelsea Plant of the Year in 2013 and it is *Mahonia eurybracteata* 'Soft Caress', a selection from a Chinese plant. However it seems to be less hardy so be careful where you put it.



There is no difficulty in cultivating Mahonias; they need no special soil or attention and just get on with it. However they do not like a boggy soil and prefer it on the dry side with some shade. If you want to prune it to prevent some of the bare stems higher up, you should do it in March or April but you can do it at any time of the year.

The only pests to be seen on Mahonias are rust and powdery mildew which in fact I have never seen in my or any other garden, so they are pretty bombproof.