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THE HELLEBORUS X HYBRIDUS, or Lenten rose, was given its nickname because it blooms from February to April—that 40-day period between Ash Wednesday and Easter—known and celebrated in liturgical churches as Lent. Just when the winter doldrums begin to set in, this glorious plant springs to life—a burst of light and hope echoing the promise of resurrection in the midst of darkness.

Although these particular Hellebores resemble wild roses, they are not true roses. They belong to the Ranunculaceae family. The most widely known Lenten rose has rich dark green foliage and light yellow-green to vibrant red petals. However, there are many varieties and colors can range from a deep blood-red to pure white and subtle gradations in between. The bloom has five petals surrounding a ring of small cup-like pods. Unlike most flowers, the sepals don't fall, but hold on until spring arrives.

The foliage and flowers of the Lenten rose are perfect for cut flower arrangements. When cutting a stem from a plant, be sure to cut at an angle and then cut vertical into the stem about one inch. This will help the stem and flower absorb more water and survive for at least a week, maybe longer. Try a frothy gathering of Lenten roses in a small, round ceramic container, or one to three blooms in a silver trumpet vase, or even a Lenten wire wreath to celebrate the season.

Culture

Plant a Lenten rose in rich, loose, woodsy soil and fertilize in early spring. This is a slow growing plant that dislikes being disturbed and will be slow to recover when moved.

Light

Heavy to light shade

Moisture

Prefers moist well drained soil but is adaptable to drier situations.

Hardiness

Zones 4-9 - evergreen from Zone 6 to 9.

Propagation

By division in late summer or autumn

Can also be grown from seed but seedlings take three years to bloom.

holy helleborus

The lovely Lenten rose

BY TROY RHONE

CULTIVARS TO CONSIDER:

Red Lady : single petal, deep red

Pink Lady : single petal, white with blushed pink

Winter Queen: single petal, red, lavender to pink petals

Mrs. Betty Ranicar: heavy double bloom, snow white