

## CYCLAMEN FOLIAGE

*Bob Brown*

Winter is a time when keen gardeners take an interest in minutiae they mightn't notice in high summer. Cyclamen are grown chiefly for their flowers, which mainly bloom from autumn through to spring, but their wintergreen leaves are almost as important. Plant them, and they almost always remain forever, particularly if they're planted under trees where the soil dries out during their dormant season. Here, they serve not only to furnish the ground in a difficult place but also to adorn it with their exquisitely patterned and coloured leaves, at what might be a dead time of the year.

The most widely grown is *Cyclamen hederifolium*, which naturalises wonder-fully in gardens by self-seeding. It has good foliage, and there are some superior forms such as *C.* 'Lysander' and silvered forms like *C.* 'Silver Cloud'. However, the very best-looking cyclamen foliage is linked to *Cyclamen graecum* (coming, as you might expect, from Greece). These days, with the help of genetic work, this major species has been split into *C. maritimum* (formerly *Cyclamen graecum* subsp. *anatolicum*), *C. graecum* subsp. *candidum* and simply *C. graecum*. They're all exquisite, having a velvety-looking sheen (due to the layering of air pockets within the leaf, which produces the silverying), beaded pinky edges and bold designs. Sadly, many *C. graecum* are not so hardy, but collections have been made from high altitudes and these plants have happily withstood winters like that of 2010. The hybridisers, like Hayden Worton at Ashwood Nursery, Kingswinford, will doubtless look to combining these hardiness genes with the best patterned foliage.



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*C. hederifolium* ssp. *crassifolium*



*C. maritimum*



*C. graecum* (High Altitude Collection)



***C. coum* in bud  
(Patterned Leaf Form)**

Keen amateurs grow some of the less tough forms in pots and, if you are prepared to protect in harsh cold, you will not have to wait for the hybridisers to work. Remember that any visit to the greenhouse in winter is a great pleasure.

The most famous winter-flowering species is *Cyclamen coum*, which has bright, dumpy flowers starting at Christmas and increasing to a peak in February. It is often plain green - which is fine - but look out for offers of those with patterned leaves, like *C.* 'Ashwood Snowflake', or leaves which are all-over silver. Eventually these will self-seed into a wonderful foliage tapestry.

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