

The background of the cover is a lush garden. In the foreground, several white daisies with yellow centers are prominent. Behind them, there are clusters of small orange flowers and purple flowers. The overall scene is a dense, colorful garden.

Southern  
Gardens,  
Southern  
Gardening

William Lanier Hunt

*southern  
gardens,  
southern  
gardening*



*"... here in the arboretum below my apartment."*

*southern  
gardens,  
southern  
gardening*

William Lanier Hunt

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To Joanne Ferguson, who first conceived of  
this book, edited it, and saw it through the  
throes of publication.



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## *introduction*

When my sister was a student at the University of North Carolina, she said to my mother, "There is a boy here that you would like; he brought his garden with him when he came to Chapel Hill." And that is how we came to know William Lanier Hunt, F.R.H.S., gardener and garden consultant, horticulturist and botanist; lecturer, writer, bibliophile; promoter and instigator of foundations, botanic gardens, and arboretums, and all good works in horticultural circles, here and abroad.

When Bill went to Chapel Hill in 1926 he was already a seasoned gardener. He was born (he says) and grew up in the celebrated Lindley Nursery in Greensboro, North Carolina. The nursery fields were his garden, and the greenhouses his playroom. He began to assemble his plants when he was a small boy and continued to add to his collections when he went to the Woodberry Forest School in Virginia. When he was ready to go to the university, two trucks were needed to transport his plants and rare bulbs to Chapel Hill. He rented a lot for his large iris collection, and he farmed out his bulbs and other plants in private gardens in the village. It was in these gardens that I first saw the oxblood lily, the roof iris (*Iris tectorum*), and *I. japonica*, formerly called *I. fimbriata*, a fitting name, as its petals are finely fringed; it was under that name when Bill gave it to me. He called the oxblood lily *Amaryllis advena*, but Dr. Hamilton Traub calls it *Hippeastrum bifidum*. It was once called *Rhodophiala*, and Dr. Traub has named a hybrid of the oxblood lily and another species of the same genus *Rhodophiala* × *huntiana* and described it in the *Amaryllis Year Book* (1964) as "floribus intense rubris usque ad rhodamino-rubellis. Holotypus: Traub no. 817 a+b (TRA)."

In those days, when spring came to Chapel Hill, everyone: students, professors, botanists, horticulturists, gardeners and nature lovers, and

most of the village used to walk to Laurel Hill to see the rhododendron in bloom on the slope above Morgan Creek. They called the flowers laurel, but they were really the rosebay, *Rhododendron catawbiense* var. *insularis*, though *Kalmia latifolia*, commonly called mountain laurel, also grows nearby. Here in the piedmont the flora of the mountains meets the flora of the coastal plain, and in addition to the plants growing here already, Dr. Ritchie Bell, the director of the North Carolina Botanical Garden, is establishing the major plant communities of the Carolinas so the flora from the coast to the boreal forest can be studied and enjoyed in one place; otherwise, as he says, it could be seen only by traveling two hundred miles.

One spring Bill joined the walkers to Laurel Hill; when he saw Morgan creek in its wooded slate valley with the remarkable native plants growing under the trees, he realized that the property must be preserved for the university and the state and that no time must be lost in doing it. He made up his mind to devote himself to this seemingly hopeless undertaking, although it would mean endless difficulties, disappointments and sore distress. It took twenty years and a world war (he said) to accomplish what he had set out to do, but the property was bought and paid for at last. In the meantime he had grown dozens of specimens of *Magnolia grandiflora* from seeds of superior clones found on the university campus, and had brought in and established more species of native plants, and introduced exotics from countries where the climate and growing conditions are similar to ours.

Then in 1960 he began to transfer the land to the university, as the Hunt Arboretum, to be administered under the new North Carolina Botanical Garden. When the gift was announced in 1961, Burke Davis wrote in his "Tar Heel Notebook" (*Greensboro Daily News*, November 26), that it was "one of the greatest gifts to the public weal, to be remembered as long as we are spared the thermonuclear torch. A handsome gesture indeed."

Laurel Hill as an arboretum seemed merely a dream when I first saw it. Robert Moncure, one of our rock-garden correspondents, who lived in Alexandria, Virginia, wrote that he would like to come to Raleigh on the Seaboard pullman one Saturday night, to spend Sunday with us, and return Sunday night. My Mother and I drove him to Chapel Hill Sunday afternoon. Bill took us to the Botanical Garden, and on through the briers and underbrush to Morgan Creek, where we stood on the highest hilltop, looking down on the clear, brown waters that sang as they swirled around Thomas Wolfe's rock, a ledge of purple slate two

hundred feet below. The air was so still the only sound to be heard was the sound of the water, until the four o'clock chimes rang out from the Bell Tower. "Think of it," Bill said. "One hundred acres of woods and fields on the edge of the campus, and in hearing of the Bell Tower, and it's older than Kew."

In those days there was much going back and forth between gardens in Raleigh and gardens in Chapel Hill. When our garden correspondents came to visit, Bill and I passed them on. Violet Walker was our first and favorite. Bill had spent much of his school days in her garden at Woodberry, Virginia. "We called her Violent," he said,—meaning that she was as passionate as he was about plants and gardens. I call to mind these early days because Bill's writings go back to that time, when first Violet Walker and then Elizabeth Rawlinson, was the editor of *Garden Gossip* (the organ of the Garden Club of Virginia); and we all wrote for it and for each other.

Sometimes visitors came from the West: one day Lester Rowntree turned up at our door, having driven across the country in her collecting car which had only one seat—the driver's. In it she drove thousands of miles every year. She drove over hills and deserts, through forests and along the seashore, from one end of the Pacific Coast to the other. Bill and I had never seen Lester before, but we had been in correspondence with her since we read in the *Atlantic Monthly* about her camping trips in the desert, and when she arrived in North Carolina, we were already friends for life. I said, "You must go to Chapel Hill to see Bill Hunt." Lester said, "Please let me sit down a minute first." My mother said, "We are expecting you to spend the night." The next morning we went to Chapel Hill.

When we got there, Bill said to Lester, "You must go to Biltmore to see Latta Clement at the Nik-Nar nursery." Lester gave me a despairing glance. We went to the Botanical Garden and Laurel Hill and had lunch at the Inn. Then Bill gave Lester directions and a well-marked road map, and sent her on to Biltmore.

Soon after that, Bill brought Camilla Bradley to have dinner with us in Raleigh. Camilla was the editor (and moving spirit) of that remarkable and short-lived magazine, *Home Gardening for the South*, for which we both wrote, along with Caroline Dormon and her sister-in-law Mrs. James Dormon and Inez Conger and their friends in Shreveport and Jo Evans from her garden at Hapahazard Plantation. And we all wrote to each other, all of the Confederacy united as in The War. Contributors and subscribers were practically the same.

When my mother and I came to Charlotte to live, I thought we would see less of Bill, but as it turned out we saw him more often. He came, bringing with him young botanists, students or faculty of the university; he came, bringing bulbs and plants for my new garden, and once he brought a rectangular block of slate from Morgan Creek Valley. We set it, like a jewel, in a low stone wall. The valley slate is dark gray when dry, but when it rains it reveals tones of Mulberry, Mauve, and Perilla Purple.

Between visits there were letters: "We certainly do have lots of things to work on, don't we?" Bill wrote in July, 1976. "In the meantime, what source do you now know for *Iris unguicularis*? You will not believe how beautiful the new walks are, here in the arboretum below my apartment. We have made them right out into space, and dug luscious beds up and down the slopes, and planted about an acre of cyclamens. There are gorgeous trees and shrubs as well as herbaceous plants on these steep slopes where no one but a few botanists have been—ever, because they are so very steep. From the paths you can look out into treetops, and look down on the huge trunks of forest trees." I can vouch for the steepness of those slopes, for I have been dragged up and down them many times. I have seen all those cyclamens too, and the glowing yellow host of *Sternbergia lutea*.

In December there were Christmas cards reporting winter bloom: "Winter sternbergias, witch hazel, and three flowers of *Cyclamen pseudibericum*. Each year just one corm out of thirty does this." And another year, on December the 26th, "There were dozens of *Sternbergia fischeriana* the moment you left." (I think *C. pseudibericum* is tender. It never bloomed for me, but then I had only one bulb.)

While Bill was acquiring the land for his arboretum, and laying out trails, and bringing in new plants, he was also spending summers in England attending the meetings of the Royal Horticultural Society, visiting Graham Thomas's roses, and the gardens of other distinguished Fellows of the society, and haunting the London bookshops in search of rare herbals and other old English garden books, weighty volumes, mostly of folio or elephant size, some illustrated with woodcuts, and some with plates engraved and colored by hand. "Thank Heaven," Bill wrote recently, "I had the sense to sacrifice and buy Dean Herbert's *Amaryllidaceae* years ago."

Bill is not one to rest on his laurels: "At long last," he wrote in 1981, "we are going to start the Southern Garden History Society. Some months back, I re-worked the bylaws of the English society to suit

fifteen Southern states. Flora Ann Bynum, John Flowers and I held several meetings winter before last, and we got the organization planned. Now, I think the first meeting could be at the Garden Symposium at Old Salem next May. Last fall I went to Natchez with Jo and Cleo to start planting the things that go with those period houses. Guess you know about the new Society at 'Calline's place.' They got it going this spring, and we are going to establish a garden of old roses there. I think I will be in Natchez this fall, and I look forward to visiting Briarwood, New Orleans, Jo Evans at Haphazard, and maybe Cleo Barnewell in Shreveport." They will be in the book.

Elizabeth Lawrence  
Charlotte, North Carolina





*southern  
gardens,  
southern  
gardening*



# january

## *the southern winter*

January is a wonderful month in the South. Snow on the magnolias one day—sunshine and winter jasmine the next. Youths skiing in the mountains—winter irises blooming in front of Rose Monroe's house in New Orleans. The first week of January is usually the coldest in the year. Even in the mid-South the thermometer may dip down to below zero, but the morning sun often brings it back up above freezing. During this first week of January, Jo Evans writes that the old-fashioned hyacinths are about to bloom in her yard at Haphazard Plantation near Natchez. Hyacinths love January down South as much as they like March in the Dutch gardens at Keukenhof. Enjoy the short southern winter while we have it; soon comes the spring and hot weather again!

The winter and spring cyclamens on my hillside have been hiding tiny buds on near-invisible stems for several weeks now. How these little stems can push up through thick oak leaves is a miracle, but they do and dare the frosts and snow. At home in the mountains around the Mediterranean, they are accustomed to the same kind of January weather we have, so the wild species from these areas adapt themselves very well to our climate in the Upper South. South of Macon, Montgomery, Jackson, Shreveport, and Dallas they need a north-facing position away from the hot sun. I am sending some to be tried even in New Orleans and Houston—but in pots where they will be high and dry! (Jo Evans thinks the muskrats ate the *Cyclamen hederifolium* she had growing up high on a cypress stump.)

Fraser's photinia is in fruit at this time of year on specimens that have enough age. A huge mass of rosy pink three hundred feet away attracted my attention last week on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It was a Fraser's photinia that had been

allowed to grow without pruning, and it was a glorious sight to behold. The berries are a little pinker than those of *Photinia serrulata*, one of its parents, and almost hide the foliage. This new photinia is going to be a great addition to the berried beauties of our winters. What a wonderful feat of Dame Nature to cross the gorgeous *serrulata* with the popular "red top" (*P. glabra*) in the old nursery of the Frasers in Alabama. The new creature is even more elegant than either parent. Old nurseries have given us many such gems.

This far south, we can grow only a few firs and spruces. They give us our Christmas trees and lend a touch of the North to southern landscapes. Native pines and "cedars" (*Juniperus virginiana*) and hemlocks cheer up southern forests in winter. Arborvitae, creeping junipers, cedars of Lebanon, and many small conifers combine with the broadleaf evergreens to enrich landscapes below Mason and Dixon's line. If your landscape loses its conifers, you will have a dull place indeed. Now is the time to plant them and brighten things up. If there is room, a group of any of the native pines will grow quickly from seedlings into bushy young trees, if they are planted in the open. Watching them grow up is a delightful experience. In full sun, they are likely to develop into large, spreading bush shapes and will remain that way up to twenty years before losing their lower branches.

Podocarpaceae are such handsome evergreens that one wonders why they have not been more widely planted in the Middle and Upper South. Here, they take the place of the true yews (*Taxus*) which do not always take kindly to our heat and drought. Except in very cool shade we cannot grow English yew, that wood that supplied Edward III with the bows and arrows to defeat the French at Crécy. But podocarpaceae and the upright plum yew (*Cephalotaxus*) resemble them enough to lend an Anglo-Saxon touch to the landscape.

### *winter tips*

Open days in January are good times to prune the tangles of shrubs which have grown too thick with old and dead wood. Don't give spireas a haircut. Go over them and remove all of the dead canes and the dead parts of otherwise healthy canes. Every little piece of live wood will bloom when spring comes. The shrubs can be cut back drastically just after they flower, but everything alive that is cut off now is full of flower buds. Gardeners either let spireas get to their full size and

development by pruning out only the dead wood, or they cut the bushes back right to the ground, or near it, every year in order to have somewhat smaller specimens with heavily flowered branches. In especially small places, spireas of all kinds can be maintained like this and kept good looking and healthy. If you need large cascades of white bloom, however, plant *Spiraea vanhouttei*, feed it well, and let it get as large as it will. Everybody knows this old, spreading bridal wreath that makes large fountains of white arching sprays better than any other one. It blooms with the old-fashioned white iris, blue flags, and Darwin tulips. For a change, get some pink 'Clara Butt' tulips and some other kinds that are not red and plant them next fall in this color scheme. The old red Darwin 'Farncombe Sanders' has become too common with these other plants. 'City of Haarlem' is a beautiful, intense tulip that goes well with spireas and irises and is a bit different from the shade of red usually seen with them. 'Duc van Thol' tulips in shades of yellow are also good with this combination.

There is hardly a more useful group of spring-flowering shrubs than the spireas. After the early, delicate-flowered *S. thunbergii* blooms, and overlapping with it, comes the upright and fairly tall bridal wreath *S. prunifolia*, with its tiny double "roses." It is a mistake to try to make this tallish shrub into a rounded, short one. It will steadily send up more and more long wands that have to be cut off. It is best used at the back of shrubbery plantings or in some place where there is a narrow area in need of an early flowering, upright shrub.

*S. thunbergii* is a never-failing source of delight when it blooms with its wisps of tiny blossoms at daffodil time. The red or pink flowering quinces bloom at the same time and make a fine color combination during that cold, early time in the spring garden. The newer flowering quinces are now easier to get at our southern nurseries than they used to be. Everyone should investigate them because the quinces are tough shrubs that provide us with a long season of bloom. Some of the new ones come in salmon shades, and there are many different reds and pinks. There is a white form, too, that is just about the most beautiful of the more common shrubs with white flowers.

It is ridiculous to prune the quinces now, for they are just before bursting into bloom. In warm winters, they may start in January. Wait till they finish blooming. Their leaves will be out, but pruning them will not be harmful. Quinces can be shaped into a hedge, into large masses of flowering shrubs, or into more or less flat shrubs where they are up against buildings. There is nothing more glorious, however, than

great tall masses of quince in the corners and backgrounds of gardens. The birds like to nest in them because the twigs are so thick that they provide a good hiding place from hawks and cats. If your quinces get scale, spray them with a dormant spray of either a miscible oil or lime sulphur. This spray should go on soon.

Of course, you will not prune your forsythias now because you can see the buds getting ready to open. Cut sprays are easy to force in water in the house. Underneath the tangled edges of the spreading varieties, the tips take root and make little new plants. These can be taken up and moved right now, and they will grow into large shrubs right away. With a small amount of work they can be espaliered against a wall. The branches do not tug at their supports like those of pyracanthas and other heavy shrubs. The only disadvantage is that the new growth has to be tied up and pruned back as the summer comes on because they keep on with lusty growth right into July!

The early daffodils are already up and in bud. To hurry a few along, put a box over them with a pane of glass in place of the bottom and keep them well watered. Daffodils of all kinds will actually develop into larger flowers after they are cut and put into water in the house than they will if they are left growing in the garden. That is one reason why they look so large in the shows. As soon as the little paper covering on each bud is split and the flower just ready to open, the buds can be cut and put in a cool room in indirect light. Here they will keep and can be held back and a few at a time brought into warmth and light to flower.

### *color schemes*

This is the time of the year to sit down and plan color schemes for garden and grounds. If you dislike orange red quinces blooming with magenta redbuds, it is usually easier to move the quinces than the redbuds. In some gardens, there are enough flowering cherries of different shades of pink to tone down these two. White will help, too.

Gardens that are a hodgepodge of color that cannot be changed all at once can be gradually transformed by the removal of the worst offenders and the addition of plants of another color. Since there are endless beautiful color schemes that one can establish with the plants already in the landscape, it will pay to make a really serious study of what is