

## Chimonanthus praecox – Wintersweet

Chimonanthus praecox is a multi-stemmed shrub with a fountain-like shape that grows to 2.5 to 3m in height and a similar width. It is native to the mountains and gorges of northern China.

The flowers are pendent, yellow, and cup-shaped with almost translucent waxy petals and have reddish brown or even purple centres. Flowers are borne on bare willowy stems in winter and are exceptionally fragrant - just a few cut stems can fill a room with fragrance. Wintersweet well deserves its reputation as one of the world's best scented plants, the aroma is like Jonquil and Violets, but when the fragrance is inhaled close to for any length of time the smell seems to disappear.

Flowers are followed in the spring by long thinnish green leaves. Fruit appears in late Spring which are five to eight shiny brown fruits held within an urn-shaped receptacle and persist through until the following Winter.

Very frost hardy (to about -25°C), Wintersweet grows well throughout southern or eastern Australia. It likes any well drained, preferably loamy soil in a sunny sheltered position. Badly drained or compacted soils may cause blotching or yellowing of the leaves. It will succeed in most soils, but it seems most at home in chalky ones.

### Propagation

Pre-soak seed in tepid water for two hours, keep warm and moist for 3 days then stratify for 5 - 8 weeks and sow in a good quality well-draining potting mix.

Germination is usually good, though it is often slow and erratic, and takes place in 2 months or more at 13°C.

When they are large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and grow them on in a sheltered position for at least their first Winter.

Plant them out into their permanent positions in late Spring or early Summer, after the last expected frosts.