

Mrs. Robb's Bonnet

JANUARY 2000

Horticultural history has it that a certain English lady, Mrs. Robb was in Turkey in 1891, taking a fancy to a small plant, and she took it home in her hat. And so *Euphorbia robbiae* was named.

This particular perennial is un-Euphorbia-like in its partiality to shade, even dry shade under trees. Primarily used as a ground cover, it spreads gradually and densely. The dark green glossy leaves are evergreen and grow in rosettes. In very early spring, lime-green floral heads appear and last for weeks.

Try using this under a yellow-foliaged plant - perhaps a Mock Orange *Philadelphus aureus* or a needled evergreen of a golden shade.

A good winter combination with the *Euphorbia* and a must for flower arrangers would be *Arum italicum* var. 'pictum'. Its dramatic large spear-shaped leaves have prominent white veins. Going dormant in summer it starts back to life in the fall and looks spectacular all winter. New seedlings may not show the variegations right away. Once established, you will have bright red berries in late summer. The evergreen *Hellebore foetidus* is another good companion plant.

If you want to be sophisticated you could add snowdrops and white crocus. Planting them close to the roots of perennials, giving them protection from varmints. All these plants are quite drought resistant and do not seem to be palatable to the deer. You would want to plant them close to your house to give you something to look at during the bleakest days of winter.

Joan Sargent, a longtime member and master gardener who passed away in August 2012; wrote about 24 gardening columns for NCBL through the years for our newsletter. We are reprinting them again.



Top 2 photos: Mrs. Robb's Bonnet and other wood spurges are deer resistant because the characteristic Euphorbia milky sap is slightly poisonous. It can irritate hands.

Hardy to 10 below zero F, zones 5 to 9. Great for rock gardens, pots, mass plantings in dappled shade.

Bottom above: A Euphorbia sport, Red Martin called Red Spurge, would perk up a bed! It's a cross between *Euphorbia amygdaloides* and *Euphorbia characias*.

Left: *Arum italicum* 'pictum' leaves