

Winterberry Plant

by Sally Cureton

A great plant that provides color throughout the year is one that is known as Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*). It is a deciduous holly that will be green all summer long and will have a beautiful bright red berry in the winter. Slow growing, it tolerates poor soils rather well. In the wild it will put out suckers to form new plants and so create large thickets. In your yard it can be an upright round bush, or can be pruned to form a small tree. It generally grows to about 6 to 10 feet tall, but can get larger and can spread to 8 to 10 feet.

Winterberry is an excellent wildlife planting. The dense foliage provides a good nesting site for a variety of birds. The berries are attractive to cedar waxwings, bluebirds and robins throughout the winter months. In the late spring, it has a small greenish-white flower that is not especially showy. These form the basis for the subsequent berries. The glossy leaves are 1½ to 3 inches long and have a green to dark green color.

Like most hollies, it is dioecious. That means that there are separate male and female plants. Because the fruit (berry) is present only on the female plant, it is necessary to have a male pollinator nearby. This is a tough plant that is easy to grow. We have several in the Rockingham Springs Arboretum. They are placed between the red bridge and Lanier Road. As you travel up the road this time of the year, the red berries are visible.

