



It Was A Berry Good Year!

by Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center.

As the late fall days get shorter and the woody plants shed their colorful autumnal wardrobes, any touch of color is a welcome sight in our mostly brown landscape. While we can't slow the coming of winter, we can brighten our yards by using plants that produce interesting fruits. Aside from adding color to a rather drab landscape, many berry producing plants also lure avian visitors.

On the way to work each morning, I pass mass plantings of several species of viburnum; their branches loaded with bright red berries, technically called drupes. Most likely they are either the European (*V. opulus*) or American (*V. trilobum*) cranberrybush viburnum. Both are somewhat upright in form with lovely white flowers in the spring and brilliant, small but plentiful red drupes. They have 3-lobed, maple-shaped leaves that redden come fall. The fruits hold well into the winter and are sought by many birds and other forms of wildlife. They can even be made into jams.

Two other viburnums with red fruit have similar characteristics, but one may exhibit some invasive characteristics according to the UConn Plant Database (<https://plantdatabase.uconn.edu/>). Both the linden (*V. dilatatum*) and the Wright viburnum (*V. wrightii*) are multi-stemmed shrubs reaching up to 10 feet in height with clusters of creamy flowers in the spring, handsome, toothed, green foliage in summer changing to shades of red in the fall and persistent red fruit in the fall. Linden viburnums have been found to spread both from seeds as well as by layering, naturalizing on sites from the mid-Atlantic region into New York and Connecticut outcompeting native plants.

Both deciduous and evergreen hollies are also at their best this time of year. Many excellent cultivars of deciduous hollies (*Ilex verticillata*) are available in compact and heavily fruited forms. You will notice their native parents in wet areas with their red berries, attractive but less abundant and not as compact as the cultivars. While red berried forms are most common, orange and yellow berry cultivars are also available.

The Meserve blue hollies and the China hollies are reliably hardy evergreen varieties with spiny leaves and red berries. Our native American holly (*I. opacum*) is not as cold

hardy but does well in protected areas and in the southern part of the state. The species reaches 15 to 30 feet tall but numerous cultivars including dwarf and columnar forms might be a good match for your site. Keep in mind when purchasing hollies that males and females are separate plants. One male can pollinate 3 to 10 females depending on the species. Be sure to purchase both sexes if you want berries.



Holly berries by dmp2021

Cotoneasters are plants for all seasons. They have neat, oval leaves of a glossy green, white or pinkish flowers in spring, and lots of colorful red berries that last well into winter. Especially notable is the rockspray cotoneaster (*C. horizontalis*) with its arching branches. Cotoneasters are useful in foundation plantings and look lovely when their branches cascade over walls. The only downside to cotoneasters is the time it takes each spring to pluck wind blown leaves from their grasp.

The red chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*) is native to the U.S. and produces a great crop of red or in the case of black chokeberry (*A. melanocarpa*) – blackish purple berries that last well into winter. As the name suggests, they are rather astringent, but also high in polyphenols, which have been shown to have beneficial health properties. One can purchase numerous over the counter products containing aronia compounds. These plants are tough, adaptable plants that grow well from full sun to part shade and form 3 to 5-foot tall colonies as they spread by suckering. Birds will feed on berries as they soften over the winter. Fall color is notable in burgundy, orange and crimson shades.

Another intriguing plant is the beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) which bears large clusters of iridescent purple berries on the tips of arching stems. This more southern native fruits best in USDA hardiness zones 6 – 10 or in more sheltered areas of zone 5. Plants are 3 to 8 feet tall and wide and work well in mixed borders. They tolerate heat

and humidity well. Stems often die back over winter, much like butterfly bushes, so cut back when new growth is noticed in the spring. Berries are attractive to birds and other wildlife.

Consider adding some fall fruiting plants to liven up your late autumn landscape. If you have any questions about these plants or any other topic, feel free to call the UConn Home & Garden Education Center (toll-free) at (877) 486-6271, visit our web site, www.ladybug.uconn.edu or contact your local Extension office.