

Eco-Friendly Native Plant of the Month

JANUARY 2017

NC NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

REEDY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

Photos by Larry Mellichamp



Northern Mockingbird with *Ilex verticillata* fruit by Will Stuart

Ilex verticillata Winterberry Holly

A Super Winter Show

The superlatives for Winterberry Holly are numerous and deservedly so. As a deciduous native shrub, the red berries provide a spectacular winter focal point in the garden. And Winterberry is favored as one of the hollies that will bear fruit in partial shade, making it a popular choice. Gil Nelson says, "No southern garden should be without it." The cut stems, laden with berries, can be displayed indoors for many weeks.

Landscape Uses

Winterberry is a clump forming shrub that can grow to 10 feet tall and spread almost as wide. Because of its moisture loving habit, Winterberry Holly would be an excellent choice for a rain garden, by soaking rain run off or accumulated water. However, be careful to monitor your Winterberry Holly if it is located in a drier



Male? Female?

Look closely at holly flowers in spring. Male flower on left, with 7 stamens. Female on right with a single green pistil.

location during our hot or droughty summers. It is one that definitely may need supplemental watering.

Eco-benefits

The red berries on a Winterberry Holly are more than attractive features in the landscape. Cedar waxwings, mockingbirds, and robins enjoy these fruits well into the winter. According to Doug Tallamy, the hermit thrush subsists largely on holly berries during the winter, darting in and out of the shrub

whenever the protective mockingbird is off duty.

The small clusters of tiny flowers in late spring (May) are not showy, but attractive to bees. Winterberry serves as a larval host for Henry's Elfin butterfly.

Holly Tricks

Winterberry, like many hollies, is dioecious, meaning male and female flowers occur on separate plants. Therefore be very careful to select both a male and female while shopping, and plant rather closely, to insure berries. Nurseries often pair cultivars with compatible bloom time, such as 'Winter Red' with 'Southern Gentleman', 'Red Sprite' with 'Jim Dandy', and dwarf varieties 'Berry Poppins' with 'Mr. Poppins'.

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