

## Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*)

Alex X. Niemiera, Associate Professor, Department of Horticulture

### Summary:

Foliage: Deciduous broadleaf

Height: 10 feet

Spread: 10 feet

Shape: Upright oval

Winterberry is a large shrub and somewhat informal in character. There are cultivars that are shorter and have a more formal appearance. This native wetland species has very showy bright red fruit (on female plants) in early autumn that persist till February.

### Plant Needs:

Zone: 4 to 8

Light: Partial shade to full sun

Moisture: Wet to moist but will do fine in soils with "average" moisture regimes

Soil Type: Sandy, loam, or clay

pH Range: 3.5 to 6.0

### Functions:

Suggested uses for this plant include border, screen, massing, and attracting wildlife. This plant is most affective and showy when used in mass.

### Planting Notes:

Plant one male plant in the vicinity of female plants to ensure fruit. You must make sure that your male flowers in the same time period as your female winterberries. Consult local garden center personnel for this information.

Tolerates wide range of soil types, but prefers moist, acid soils.

### Care:

Requires little maintenance.

Responds well to pruning. For increased fruiting, prune in early spring to increase branching. This pruning will decrease fruiting the following year but will pay dividends in future years.

### Problems:

Develops iron chlorosis in high pH soils.

Fruit may abort during periods of drought.

### Alternatives:

Consult local garden centers, historic or public gardens and arboreta, regarding cultivars and related species that grow well in your area.

Cultivars of *Ilex verticillata*:

`Cacapon', `Fairfax', `Shava' and Winter Red® are noted for their showy fruit. `Autumn Glow' has red fruit and orange and yellow fall color.

`Red Sprite' (also sold as `Nana') is a compact (4 feet high) and relatively large red fruit. Beautiful.

### Comments:

Only female plants produce berries, but plants of both sexes need to be present to ensure fruiting. Select a male cultivar that flowers at the same time as the female cultivar.

Red fruits will persist into January/February depending on winter conditions.

Many cultivars exist with superior fruit.

*This material was developed by Carol Ness as part of the Interactive Design and Development Project funded by the Kellogg Foundation.*