Brighten the Winter Landscape with Deciduous Hollies

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With over 400 species from which to choose, hollies are a great addition to the landscape. One attractive feature, which helps to brighten our winter days, is berries. Of the 400 species, at least 30 are deciduous and their abundant crops of berries are even more eye-catching after leaves fall. Depending on the bird population, berries can persist into March and April.

When selecting hollies, keep in mind that they are either male or female, but only females produce berries. The males produce whitish flowers, containing sticky, yellow pollen. By contrast, the females produce fewer blooms, and each bloom contains a green, pea-like pistil, which develops into the berry. Insects carry the pollen to the female flower from a male of the same species. One male is enough to supply pollen to as many as 20 female plants, but the distance between them should be less than one eighth of a mile.

Possomhaw Holly (*Ilex decidua*) is a native plant with an upright, spreading form and red berries. 'Byer's Golden' is a cultivar with yellow berries. 'Pocahontas' and 'Warren's Red' have red berries, and 'Council Fire' has orange berries. 'Red Escort' is considered one of the best pollinators.

Common Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) is probably the best known species. Verticillata means "arranged in whorls" and refers to the way berry clusters are attached to the branches in a circular fashion. It is also called Black Alder because the leaves turn black at the first frost if they have not already fallen. 'Afterglow' grows about 10 feet high and wide and has orange-red berries. 'Red Sprite' is compact and rounded, growing only four to five feet tall. Others varieties include 'Winter Gold', 'Maryland Beauty', and 'Winter Red', which are widely available. 'Jim Dandy' and 'Southern Gentleman' are pollinators.

'Sparkleberry', 'Bonfire', and 'Harvest Red' are all hybrids of *Ilex verticillata and Ilex serrata.* 'Sparkleberry' grows 12 feet high and wide and has brilliant red berries almost one-third of an inch in diameter. 'Apollo' is a pollinator.

Deciduous hollies have the same cultural requirements as evergreen hollies. They grow best in a slightly acid, well-drained soil, rich in organic matter. Common winterberry is native to swampy areas and will tolerate wet soils. Plants will grow well in part shade, but full sun will result in more berries.

For more information on hollies and other landscape plants, visit Clemson's Home and Garden Information Center on the web at http://hgic.clemson.edu or call toll free 1-888-656-9988.