



LET'S GROW Native

Column and photographs by
Carol A. Heiser

Fall is the best time to plant shrubs and trees, and there are several native species that offer excellent habitat structure, food for wildlife, or refreshing color to the landscape. Below, are a few great examples.



American Beautyberry

The leaves of American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) turn a beautiful chartreuse hue and form a dramatic backdrop to tight clusters of plump, pink berries along its stems. Birds such as thrashers, towhees, quail and robins, and numerous mammals including opossums, raccoons, gray foxes, and squirrels, will consume these berries throughout autumn.

Winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*) is another landscape favorite whose bright red berries are equally valuable to wildlife, especially later in the fall and winter,



Winterberry Holly

because its fruit persists when other food sources become increasingly scarce.

When you're designing your space and trying to decide on placement, imagine how fall colors will pop in different parts of the yard, such as the dark red leaves of a flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), or the rich golden amber of a sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*) island adjacent to a woodland edge.

Evergreens are essential in any good wildlife habitat to provide protection to songbirds and mammals that will soon be seeking shelter from winter winds. In the

eastern part of Virginia, your best bet is to plant a shrub border or wide bed of sun-loving southern bayberry or wax-myrtle (*Myrica (or Morella) cerifera*). In optimal growing conditions, mature shrubs are full of thick masses of leathery leaves. Be sure you purchase female plants, which will produce numerous bluish-gray, waxy berries that provide high energy fat for over 40 bird species, including warblers that stopover during fall migration and also winter resident species like mockingbirds, cardinals and Carolina wrens.

In the western part of the state, treat yourself to wonderful evergreens like the great rhododendron or white rosebay (*Rhododendron maximum*), or catawba rhododendron or mountain rosebay (*R. catawbiense*). These species will tolerate some sun but do require afternoon shade, and next spring they'll reward you with gorgeous clusters of pink flowers. A smaller native evergreen in the same family is mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), which occurs throughout the state and is fairly adaptable to sunny or shady conditions, although it grows best in partial shade.

Carol A. Heiser is Education Section Manager and Habitat Education Coordinator at the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

RESOURCES

- ◆ *Common Native Shrubs and Woody Vines of Virginia Identification Guide*, VA Department of Forestry: www.dof.virginia.gov/infopubs/Native-Shrub-ID-spreads_2016_pub.pdf
- ◆ *Tree and Shrub Planting Guidelines*, VA Cooperative Extension Pub. #430-295 www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/430/430-295/430-295.pdf