

Winterberries Enliven the Winter Landscape

Hollies are almost synonymous with winter, particularly the impressive evergreen trees notable for their dark shiny foliage and colorful (usually red) fruits. Polly appreciates all sorts of hollies, but she has a special fondness for the winterberries or deciduous hollies. These large shrubs produce spectacular displays of showy orange or red fruits on bare branches.

The North American winterberry, *Ilex verticillata*, grows on the Island in coastal marsh areas, beside streams, and in moist roadside ditches. In North America its range extends from Nova Scotia to Wisconsin and south to Florida. Last fall in Japan, I collected seed from the Japanese winterberry, *Ilex serrata*, a close relative of our native species. Both hollies make a terrific addition to the fall and winter garden. Numerous selections, including hybrids between the two species, have been introduced to the horticultural trade.

In 1958 Polly observed a compact plant of our native winterberry growing across State Road in the Littlefield pasture. As she was so inclined, she collected and germinated the seed. Over time she noticed tremendous variability in the progeny. She selected the best and registered the cultivar names with the Holly Society of America. Her most notable introductions are 'Tiasquam' with large, red fruits set off by dark green foliage, and 'Earlibright' with large, persistent, orange-red fruits.

While Polly is enamored with our native winterberries, she admits her favorite deciduous holly of them all is the National Arboretum introduction 'Sparkleberry'.



The PHA introduction 'Tiasquam' is vibrant on a February day at the Arboretum.



The selection 'Winter Red' was recently added to the Arboretum collections.

This hybrid between the native and Japanese winterberry consistently produces a dazzling display of red fruits. Winterberries are dioecious, which means that male and female flowers appear on separate individual plants. Female plants need a male pollinator nearby (within 50 feet) for fruit set to occur. At the Arboretum, the male cultivar 'Apollo' serves as the pollinator for 'Sparkleberry'.

Be sure to come to the Arboretum this winter to admire the beauty of these

incredible plants. New to our collection this year are 'Winter Red' and 'Winter Gold' both introduced by Simpson Nursery, a wholesale nursery in Indiana. These superior cultivars are notable for their prolific fruit displays against dark foliage. 'Winter Red' may be familiar to Islanders who shop at the up-island Cronig's Market. There are several beautiful shrubs within the parking islands complemented by the tawny colors of ornamental grasses. — *Tim Boland*



Two large stands of winterberries flank the entryway to the North Field.