

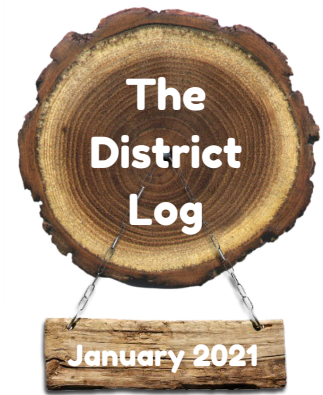
Species Spotlight: Winterberry

In the heart of winter, the forest can sometimes be a dreary place. For those of us who brave the harsh winds and bitter cold, there are sights that can fill the wood with the color and vibrancy of Spring. One such sight is the Common Winterberry, *Ilex verticillata*, also known as “Michigan Holly” or “Coralberry”. The fruits of these shrubs are at the peak of their beauty in the lean months, and provide a great number of benefits to the critters of the woods, especially songbirds. There is more to this showy plant than bright red berries, and it makes the woods of Michigan that much more interesting.

Winterberry can be found all over Michigan, and ranges as far South as the Carolinas, and to the North into Maine. This species prefers soils that are rich and moist, and is most commonly found in wetland habitats. However, it is also occasionally found on sand dunes and open grassland. This wide range of moisture tolerance, as well as an innate resistance to salt stress, makes it a very hardy shrub wherever it decides to grow. It prefers growing in openings where it can get full sun, or at least is only partially blocked by the forest canopy. As with all hollies, this species is dioecious, which means that there are separate male and female plants. Unlike American Holly, *Ilex opaca*, this species does shed its leaves in the winter. Both male and female plants will produce small white flowers in the Spring, barely noticeable when compared to the crimson fruit that matures on female plants late in winter. Their vivid color during the winter and high tolerance of soil and moisture types makes this shrub a favorite as an ornamental plant.

Since the most sought-after trait of the Winterberry is the fruit, it can be easy to overlook the male trees. However, both are important sources of food for pollinator species, including honeybees and butterflies. The berries that these pollinators help produce are enjoyed by a wide variety of songbirds. Most notably among them are the Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Bluebird, and American Robin. While the wild shrub has beautiful red berries, the species has been cultivated at nurseries to have a broad range of gold, orange, and red colors. Be careful though, as the berries are toxic for humans when eaten!

Learning about the trees and shrubs in the forest can help you get even more enjoyment out of your land. Every species has a story, and learning about them can make all the difference when planning for the future of your forest. If you want more information like this, or have other questions about trees in general, the Barry Conservation District has a forester on staff who can help you! District Forester Ben Savoie provides forest resources, management planning advice, and referrals to local forestry professionals at no cost to you. You can reach Ben at 269-908-4134, or by email at ben.savoie@macd.org.



This Month by the numbers:

Site Visits - 6

Site Visit Acreage - 366

Private Sector Referrals - 5

Public Sector Referrals - 3

Media Occurrences - 4

Open Referrals

08-21-10

New owner requesting assistance with timber harvest for clearing room for new house, as well as promoting oak regrowth. 40 Acres, Mixed Hardwoods with dominant Oak component. Prairieville Twp, Barry County.

