

Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*)

Family: Holly (Aquifoliaceae)

DESCRIPTION: The bright red drupes — the fruits that give this attractive woody shrub its name — persist through winter. The plant is commonly found in wetlands; its native range generally includes the eastern part of Minnesota.

USES: Commonly used in landscaping for the pop of winter color they provide, winterberry fruits are poisonous to humans, but provide food to small mammals, some birds and pollinating insects. The plant is a host for some caterpillars and moths. It is somewhat low on palatability for browsing and grazing animals.

REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
[USDA Plants Database](#)
[Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#)
[Minnesota Department of Natural Resources](#)



Range Map Credit: USDA
Plants Database



Planting Recommendations

Winterberry produces dense branches that zigzag up to a spreading crown. It is recommended that male and female plants be planted within 40 feet of each other for successful pollination and showy drupes. For best results, leave at least 8 feet of space around each shrub. Planting more female plants is beneficial to wildlife, because they provide food. Winterberry is routinely available commercially. It may be propagated by bare root, seed and container,

but the seeds require cold stratification. If seeds are harvested, they are best germinated immediately after collection. Winterberry is less successful with propagation via cuttings or sprigs as determining the timing of the plant's dormant season can be an issue. Winterberry is well-suited for wet ditches, streambanks and swales; elsewhere, its low drought tolerance may require more watering. It is well adapted to fine- and medium-textured soils.

**STATEWIDE
WETLAND
INDICATOR
STATUS:** FACW

ID: A shrub with brownish-gray bark and slim twigs that grow in a zigzag pattern, winterberry ranges from 5 to 15 feet tall. Finely toothed and mostly elliptical, the simple, alternate leaves grow 2 to 4 inches long and up to 1½ inches wide. White flowers bloom in late spring, with female flowers eventually turning brown. In the fall, leaves turn yellow. The berries grow flush with the stem, reaching up to a third-inch in diameter.

SIMILAR SPECIES:

Wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*) has red berries, but can be distinguished by its mintlike fragrance when crushed. Two other species common in ornamental plantings produce red berries, but have thorns: the noxious common barberry (*Berberis vulgaris*) and invasive Japanese barberry (*Berberis japonica*).

Developed by **Solimar Garcia Barger**, BWSR wetland mitigation program assistant

