

## It's The Berries

By Kathleen Cue, Nebraska Extension Horticulture Educator

As autumn's colorful leaves fall to the ground, our attention turns to berries as a source of color in our landscapes and for cuttings to grace our tables and entryways.

Crabapples represent some of the most reliable of spring's breathtaking flowers, but the fruit they produce also offer an array of yellow, orange and red in the fall. Older crabapple varieties are notorious for fallen fruit that become a mess on sidewalks and driveways. Instead, look for varieties with persistent fruit so they stay prettily on the tree until the songbirds, like cedar waxwings, help themselves. Crabapple varieties with persistent fruit include 'Harvest Gold', 'Indian Summer', 'Centurion' and 'Christmas Holly', among others.

Shrubs can also add some beautiful and unexpected colors. Take, for instance, the beautyberry (*Callicarpa* spp.) The berries on this shrub are tiny, just 1/8 of an inch, but there are so many clusters of these bright purple berries along the stem that the color makes up for their small size. The native Chenault coralberry and Indian currant coralberry (*Symphoricarpos* spp.) are underutilized small shrubs providing clustered fruits ranging in color from pink to purplish-red. The Eastern wahoo, *Euonymus atropurpureus*, is a big shrub, 12-24 feet high, that produces a beautiful pink seed capsule that opens to reveal the red berry inside.

If you are a fan of the evergreen holly but find winter's drying winds too much for the leaves, try one of the deciduous hollies instead. You won't have the benefit of the beautiful leaves in the winter, but the fruit themselves are quite spectacular. Varieties to grow include 'Bonfire', 'Harvest Red', and 'Red Sprite'. There are male and female forms of holly, with the females being the fruit producers, but you'll still need a male holly for pollinating the female flowers.

Then there are the annual plants that provide interesting fruits. One of my favorites is the ornamental pepper. Not to be eaten because of their ferocious heat, *Capsicum* 'Black Pearl' produces dark-purple-to-black round peppers that ripen to bright red. Another annual plant to grow in your garden is pumpkin-on-a-stick. This plant is actually an eggplant (*Solanum integrifolium*) but the fruits are glossy green and ribbed like a pumpkin, gradually ripening to bright orange. To dry annual plants for their fruit, pull the stems from the soil and hang the plants upside down to dry in a cool (not freezing) place that has good air circulation.

Whether it's a true berry or simply plants with interesting fruit, the transition from fall into winter can still offer some beautiful colors.

**Interested in finding out more about the Nebraska Extension Master Gardener program's 2019 Dodge County classes?** Plan to attend one of two informational meetings in November:

November 15, 5:30 pm, Nebraska Extension in Dodge County, 1206 West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street in Fremont

OR

November 16, 1:30 pm, Nebraska Extension in Washington County, 597 Grant Street in Blair.