

IN THE DIRT

Are You Interested in Becoming a Master Gardener?

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension will host trainings in January or February. For more information contact the Nebraska Extension Office in Wayne County at 402-375-3310 or visit the Northeast Nebraska Master Gardener Website at

<http://extension.unl.edu/statewide/madison/northeast-nebraska-master-gardener-home/>

A Holly Jolly Landscape!



Not surprisingly, many ancient cultures in the temperate world revered evergreen plants. According to Sandra Mason, Extension Educator with the University of Illinois, during the blinding cold of winter evergreens look as green and cheery as a summer's day. Ancient Romans believed holly warded off lightning strikes and witchcraft. Early Celts used holly in their winter solstice celebrations. Holly continues in its long tradition as a winter decoration inside and outside the home.

Garden centers and florists sell lovely holly branches for winter decorations. Cut holly branches will last for weeks even out of water. To dress up those

empty outside containers, stick in a few branches of holly, redbird dogwood and evergreens.

Holly for fruit display in the landscape requires a bit of sex education. Hollies come as male or female plants. Both are needed for heavy fruit set. However, a single male can pollinate several females. How do you know if it's a male or female? Look under the leaves of course! Actually you would have to look closely at the flowers to sex an existing plant or wait to see which one has fruit. Fruit is produced only on the females. When purchasing hollies their sex is usually quite clear with their sex-appropriate names.



Evergreen Hollies for Nebraska Landscapes

The Meserve hybrid hollies are known for their winter hardiness and durability. However any of the evergreen hollies appreciate a protected site out of wind and a bit of afternoon shade in summer. Soil should be moist, slightly acidic and well drained. If you are planning on adding hollies in the spring, prepare the soil now with plenty of compost and sulfur according to a soil test. The east side of a house is a prime location for evergreen hollies.

Of the Meserve hollies 'Blue Girl' and Blue Princess® and their corresponding 'Blue Boy' and Blue Prince® are good for our area. Blue Stallion® and Blue Maid® have lovely blue green leaves year around. Blue Stallion's® leaves are not quite as prickly so are better for high traffic areas. Although their leaves are not quite as blue-green as the Blue series China Boy® and China Girl® show good heat and cold tolerance.

The numerous holly species are a mixed bag of characteristics in leaf shapes, sizes, evergreen, deciduous, red fruits or black fruits. American Holly, *Ilex opaca*, has a grand red fruit display but allow plenty of room for these 30-foot trees. Japanese Holly, *Ilex crenata*, and Inkberry, *Ilex glabra*, are grown for their boxwood-like evergreen leaves and not for their black berries. Always check the winter hardiness rating for any holly before using it in your landscape to ensure it will be able to survive Nebraska's growing conditions.

Deciduous Hollies

We may think of evergreen hollies first but some native deciduous hollies are worthy of our attention. 'Warren's Red' a cultivar of the North American native Possumhaw, *Ilex decidua*, is a particularly heavy fruiter.

Common Winterberry, *Ilex verticillata*, is native to moist to wet areas of eastern North America. Its durable background translates into a tough insect and disease resistant shrub. Winterberry is excellent massed in front of pine trees or next to ponds. It has a compact rounded habit of up to nine feet tall. The dark green deciduous leaves are rounded in contrast to the prickly leaves of most evergreen hollies. Fall color is yellow tinged with maroon.

Winterberry's pea-sized fruit are abundant, bright red and not obscured by the leaves. Even though the fruit ripens in September they hang on for dear life until December or January.

The fruit of cultivar 'Winter Red' decorates the landscape until March or April for a long lasting winter display. The slightly larger fruit tends to hold a pleasing bright red color longer. In summer the leaves are leathery dark green. 'Winter Red' can get 8-9 feet tall and wide. For smaller landscapes the cultivar 'Red Sprite' is best at only to 3-5 feet tall. An excellent Winterberry hybrid is 'Sparkleberry', an introduction from the U.S. National Arboretum.

Happy holly days!

Source: John Fech, Nebraska Extension Educator - Horticulture

Ice and Snow Loads on Trees

Ice and snow loads often occur during Nebraska winters. For evergreens, this can translate into branch breakage. A method used to protect evergreen shrubs from ice or snow loads is loosely tying stems together. If an ice or snow storm is predicted, twine can be used to loosely tie branches of valuable evergreen shrubs together for support. Start by tying the end of the twine around a sturdy stem near the base of the plant. Then loosely wrap the twine around and up the shrub to encircle about three-fourths of the plant and tie the twine to a sturdy stem. The goal is to prevent a snow or ice load from spreading or bending branches far enough to break. It is not to immobilize branches. Most spread or bent branches return to normal position as long as they do not break. Leave the twine in place until all ice has melted naturally. Never attempt to break ice off of a plant. This is dangerous and can cause branches to break. Snow can be carefully brushed off. Twine can be left in place for future storms, as long as it is removed in spring.

For fruit and small ornamental trees, two by fours can be used to prop up branches when an ice or snow storm is predicted. It is helpful to cut a v-shaped wedge in one end of the two by four to provide more stability when supporting branches.

