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### Winterberry

➤ CHRISTMAS IS already occupying a considerable place in the thoughts of children, and therefore, of necessity, in the activities of those who cater to the Christmas trade.

Even now the gatherers of holly and other Christmas greens are beginning to get their wares together, for in many cases these decorations must be shipped hundreds of miles, which takes a lot of time. Holly grows wild throughout the South, and along the Atlantic seaboard, except for the northern New England states. It can be cultivated inland.

We have become so used to thinking of holly as a mild-climate plant that it surprises us a little to learn of a native American holly that thrives perfectly well in the winter climate of the North, even in the upper Mississippi valley. We do not recognize it as a holly, because it does not have the hard, glossy, prickly leaves of our old familiar Yuletide friend, and because its softer foliage changes color and drops off in late autumn, in orthodox fall-leaf fashion.

But the winterberry is a true holly none the less, as will be recognized in a moment if one examines the round, red, glistening berries with which its slender stems are decked.

Botanical name for the holly family is Aquifoliaceae, and it includes some 300

species, distributed mostly in Central and South America. There are many kinds found in the U. S., however, and practically all of them belong to the genus *Ilex*, or true holly.

The winterberry is also known as the black alder, and is closely related to the smooth winterberry found in the swamps from Georgia to Pennsylvania. The winterberry does not reach tree size, as the Christmas holly does—it is never more than a tall and somewhat straggling bush.

In Virginia, it sometimes reaches a height of 25 feet, though its ordinary stature averages only about five or ten feet. It is found from Nova Scotia south to Florida, and westward as far as Missouri.

Like most of our other bright-berried shrubs, the winterberry has suffered considerably from the depredations of commercial collectors. Those interested in preserving the beauty of our native woodlands urge private individuals not only to refrain from taking winterberry, but also to refuse to buy it if it is offered on the market.

Science News Letter, December 4, 1954

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