

*Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian*

## A berry, Merry Christmas ... mostly for the birds



**Viburnum berries are a satisfying food for feathered friends and some species are edible by humans.**

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### **For the birds...**

Peeking through leaves and decorating trees and shrubs, winter berries are nature's Christmas décor. As beautiful as they are, the most critical element of growing these botanicals in your garden is the nutritional fare they provide for the birds and other wildlife during the coldest season of the year when food sources are limited. There are several other autumn ripened



Photos Cynthia Brian

**Yew berries are poisonous except for the red flesh arils.**

berry-bearing bushes or vines that still have shriveled fruit hanging, such as grape and elderberry, that can be left for the birds. Here's a sampling of vibrant holiday berry dinners fit for the birds.

Cotoneaster emerged as a volunteer in my garden, most likely from seeds brought in by birds. It is an evergreen shrub that grows into a tree if not properly pruned sporting white flowers in spring that are a magnet for bees and rich red berries in winter that are a delicacy for birds. Deer munch on the branches which doesn't bother the bush. Cotoneaster is fire-resistant and can be propagated from cuttings, although I have found that once one cotoneaster is in a landscape, others seem to sprout like weeds.

Holly has glossy leaves that are either serrated or have spiny teeth. Because most hollies are dioecious, you'll need to plant both a male and female for cross-pollination if you want those glorious red berries to decorate garlands, wreaths, and Christmas trees. English holly and American holly are the two species most used during the holidays. Although holly berries tend to start ripening in fall, most birds, including blackbirds and song thrushes don't start feeding on them until late winter when other food is scarce.

Chinese pistache is one of my favorite trees for its exuberant fall color of yellows and oranges with attractive berries that metamorphose from green to aqua, to pink, and finally magenta. Birds, turkeys, quail, and squirrels go crazy for the bunches of berries that hang from the branches. I add a few sprays to my Christmas tree whenever the fowl and squirrels are kind enough to leave me a few bunches.

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