

*Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian*

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



Pyracantha berries are a favorite dinner for robins.

Photo Cynthia Brian

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Pomegranates are a staple of the Christmas fruit basket because of their festive holiday colors. The arils are filled with antioxidants, potassium, fiber, vitamins, and minerals, packing a punch to keep us healthy. Add them to salads, make a chutney, or stir a splash of juice in a glass of sparkling wine for a festive, flavorful indulgence.

The pretty pink peppercorns from a California pepper tree are a gourmet's desire. Since these trees are grown as ornamentals many people don't realize that their berries are edible, with a fruity, spice profile that complements numerous recipes. They can be dried or used fresh. I have found the best way to grind them is with my mortar and pestle because their paper-thin husks get caught in my twist grinder. When making stews or soups, I toss the whole berry, called a drupe because it is a single seed, in the pot. If you buy pink peppercorns, be prepared to pay \$10-15 per ounce. Consider planting a California pepper tree which will grow to 30 feet tall and wide if you have the room.

Although it is mid-December, my roses continue to bloom. This month I am no longer dead-heading my bushes as I want the rosehips to form. Since roses are in the same family as apples and crab apples, the taste of rosehips mimics the tartness of crab apples. The seeds/berries of rosehips have powerful disease-fighting capabilities and are packed with vitamin C. After washing the hips, use them to make jellies, teas, syrups, soups, and desserts.

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