

The Augusta Chronicle

COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Adding berry-bearing plants can brighten up many landscapes year-round

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Published 4:06 a.m. ET Oct. 27, 2023 | Updated 4:06 a.m. ET Oct. 27, 2023

In the fall after all the leaves have engulfed your lawn and the only thing left to see are bare limbs, finding good color is challenging. Evergreens can help with the mundane landscapes, but berries can be just what the aesthetic doctor ordered.

Planting berry producing plants is an excellent way of creating multi-season interest in your landscape.

It is common to focus on plants that bloom in the spring or even consider the fall color of a plant; however, landscapes benefit greatly by adding berry producing plants. The colorful berries brighten yards. Birds are attracted to many berries as well.

Most berries last much longer than flower blossoms so you have an extended period of color by including plants that bear berries at different times of the year.

Firethorn or pyracantha is an excellent berry producer. Hybrids are available in red or orange. They produce massive quantities of bright berries that can last until late winter.

Firethorn is fast growing, sometimes jumping 2 feet per year. Mature pyracantha can reach heights of 10-15 feet. They are excellent plant for hedges and barriers due to their formidable thorns.

Another plant similar to pyracantha that explodes with berries is cotoneaster. Depending on the variety, the berries can have huge clusters of orange to bright red. Both of these irregular growing plants are tough and disease resistant.

Burford holly is another favorite. This dependable berry producer can grow up to 25 feet high with an equally wide spread. The red berries of a Burford holly contrast nicely with its dark green glossy foliage. As an added bonus, Burford hollies are extremely tough plants.

Standard and weeping forms of yaupon hollies have smaller duller colored leaves but can be filled with thousands of small red berries for a couple of months in the late fall. Both of these hollies seldom have disease or insect pest problems and are usually drought tolerant.

An all-time favorite berry producer is the native deciduous beautyberry (*Callicarpa Americana*). After the beautyberry drops its' leaves in the fall, this shrub has graceful arching branches that become loaded with tight clusters of dark purple berries.

You can prune American beautyberry heavily in February to increase berry production. Cut it about a foot above ground.

Japanese beautyberry (*Callicarpa japonica*) is also available in nurseries and different varieties bear white or lavender berries.

Campbell Vaughn: When is the best time to prune your plants? Find out here.

There are many other interesting berry producing plants that you can add to your landscape. Grape holly (*Mahonia aquafolium*) has leathery foliage and grape like blue berries. Nandina produces red berries and is often used for Christmas decorations. Hearts-a-bustin', or *Euonymus americanus*, is an interesting native plant. It had dark green stems and bears reddish "hearts" that split open to reveal the inner fruit. A number of viburnums bear interesting berries as well.

Most berry producing plants will perform best when planted in sunny locations. Certain viburnums, however, may need protection from hot afternoon sun.

Many of these plants require good soil moisture conditions. They also will grow and fruit best when they receive adequate fertilizer applications. As a general rule, fertilize them with a general-purpose fertilizer in March, May and again in July.

Landscapes with only spring flower interest look great at first but leave you wanting more the rest of the year. Incorporate some berry-bearing plants in your landscape and you can create multi-season interest for year-round enjoyment.

