



STEPHEN &amp; KRISTIN PATEGAS

## in the garden *by Stephen and Kristin Pategas*

### Very Berry

Foliage and flowers are typically what attracts the eye to plants. More rarely it is the berries. Determining what is a berry is a bit of a challenge. There is a broad definition of a berry – “small fleshy fruit without a stone or pit” (peaches, plums, etc... are excluded). And there is the botanical definition – “a fruit with a fleshy, edible pericarp, or fruit wall, that originates from a single pistil and encases one or many seeds,” narrows it down considerably and makes it clear tomatoes, pumpkins and grapes are berries and a strawberry (seeds are on the outside) is not. Fear not, a blueberry is really a berry.

While determining what is a berry is a bit confusing, we can agree that some are edible to humans (some tasty, some not so much), most feed wildlife, some sprout in unwanted places and many provide eye candy in the garden. We take note of these subtleties and include ornamental berries (or berry-like fruits) in garden designs along with edible and favored by wildlife berries.

A few words of caution – some berries can create a mess on hard surfaces. Avoid and remove the invasive Brazilian pepper, Chinese tallow, Camphor and Chinaberry. Their seed-laden berries are spread by wind, water, wildlife and humans and the seeds germinate readily in natural areas.

For some plants we need to know whether they are male or female (aka dioecious where individual plants of the same species have either male or female flowers). This is typical of the hollies (*Ilex* species) with only the females producing berries. In this case, plant male and female plants near each other. Then the wind-driven pollen from the male finds the female and hence, little berries appear and mature.

Berries are seasonal. After they ripen they disappear quickly as either humans or wildlife harvest them. When the sugar content is just right, it is a race to beat the squirrels to our grapes. Since critters don't have as much of a sweet tooth as humans, guess who usually wins?

#### A selection of plants with ornamental berries include:

Common Name/Botanical Name/D (dioecious) and berry color  
 Awabuki sweet viburnum/*Viburnum odoratissimum* var. awabuki/red into black  
 Beautyberry/*Callicarpa americana*/magenta  
 Blackberry lily/*Iris domestica*/black  
 Blueberry species/*Vaccinium* spp./blue  
 Dwarf Indian hawthorn/*Rhaphiolepis indica*/black  
 Firebush/*Hamelia patens*/red into black  
 Firethorn/*Pyracantha coccinea*/orange-red  
 Fringe tree/*Chionanthus virginicus*/D/black  
 Golden dewdrop/*Duranta erecta*/golden-yellow  
 Holly species/*Ilex* spp./D/red  
 Jaboticaba/*Myrciaria cauliflora*/purplish-black  
 Japanese aralia/*Fatsia japonica*/black  
 Japanese aucuba/*Aucuba japonica*/D/red  
 Japanese yew/*Podocarpus macrophyllus*/D/blue  
 Leatherleaf mahonia/*Mahonia japonica* 'Bealei'/blue  
 Loquat/*Eriobotrya japonica*/golden-yellow  
 Saw palmetto/*Serenoa repens*/black  
 Simpson's stopper/*Myrcianthes fragrans*/black  
 Southern red cedar/*Juniperus virginiana* var. *silicola*/D/blue  
 Walter's viburnum/*Viburnum obovatum*/black  
 Wax myrtle/*Myrica cerifera*/D/bluish-gray



**Pictured at top: Find a red berry on all yaupon holly (*I. vomitoria*) cultivars that have female forms. Middle: A blue berry but not a blueberry, this is the dwarf Indian hawthorn. Bottom row, left: Firebush berries maturing to black. Bottom row, right: The berry of the beautyberry develops from a pink bloom.**

PHOTOS BY STEPHEN G. PATEGAS/HORTUS, OASIS