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# SUNNYSIDE THYMES

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## SMG's Grow Native! *By Jean Wolph, SMG Member*

### Why plant Winterberry (*Ilex verticillate*) in place of Asian Bush Honeysuckle?

So what's wrong with the Asian Bush Honeysuckle? The Purdue College of Agriculture has targeted it as an invasive species, recommending that agencies provide educational materials on why not to use it and in particular recommending that nurseries stop selling “Arnold's Red” in Indiana. It's also being sold under other names, including “Zabelli” and “Rem Red.”

A quick internet search shows that “Arnold's Red” is being promoted by numerous sellers in terms that are nothing short of effusive: “Profuse flower display and brilliant show of fruit each year. Darkest red blossom of any honeysuckle. Fragrant flowers in May followed by large bright red berries through June-July. Easily grown in reasonably well-drained soil. Sun or partial shade. Good for a shrub border.” Who wouldn't want an Asian Bush Honeysuckle?

According to Carleton College's arboretum's website, the Asian Bush Honeysuckle was actually once imported by the USDA as a wildlife cover and for erosion control. Too late they discovered that this variety can



*Bush Honeysuckle berries, Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org*

release chemicals into the ground that poison native plants. Furthermore, the foliage is so dense that it blocks sunlight and thereby prevents the growth of other young trees and plants. Even their berries are less nutritious than native honeysuckle berries, which

compromises the health of our wildlife.

So what's a gardener to do? Remove the Asian Bush Honeysuckle and replace it with Winterberry, of course.

Winterberry is a native shrub - a holly - found in the eastern U.S., west to Missouri, and north to Canada. The varieties I found online have smooth leaves, which makes it a preferable choice for anyone who has been

pricked by the sharp edges of some other hollies.

In the wild it can be found in moist woods and swampy areas as well as banks of streams. The Purdue College of Agriculture notes that it gets 6-8 feet tall - sometimes even taller - and has small white flowers from May to July. The leaves actually turn black or yellow in the fall, which would be an attractive feature in a home landscape. Branches are often gathered in winter because the bright, pea-sized berries are great for holiday decorating.

Other names that you may find this shrub called include Prinon, Virginia winterberry, black alder, false alder, white alder, and feverbush.

Plant it in partial to full sun to get the best fall color and berry production. Winterberry does not require pruning, an added bonus, nor does it require watering other than in times of extreme drought.

A word to the wise: If you are ready to buy, you must get a male pollinator as well as the female plant in order for berries to set.



*Winterberry. Richard Webb, Bugwood.org*

### References

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