

Bell County Master Gardener  
Tip of the Week  
by Mary Lew Quesinberry  
“Attracting Birds to the Winter Garden”

Winter makes it much easier to observe birds in the garden. On a recent cold, frigid morning one of my many Cardinals was pulling the berries from a shrub and eating it with gusto. It was a beautiful sight - the red plumage of the Cardinal, the green leaves and red berries of the shrub.

Birds add to the garden music, motion and a sense of anticipation and are easily attracted.

Encourage birds to visit your garden by including plants that produce nuts or berries, and please don't use pesticides - many birds have an insect-only diet. To have a bird filled garden you will want to provide layers of plant material for them to live and hide in. Birds appreciate clean water, so you will want to change the water in your birdbath often and rinse it with a small amount of household bleach occasionally. Black oil sunflower seed is a favorite of songbirds.

If you have an abundance of squirrels taking over the birdfeeder, substitute Safflower seed. Though squirrels find Safflower seed bitter tasting, songbirds love it. Many birds have a berry only diet and two small native trees that provide bright, red, winter berries are the Yaupon holly (*Illex vomitoria*) and Possumhaw holly (*Illex decidua*). The fruit of these hollies is an important food source for Mourning Dove, wild Turkey, Cedar waxwing, American Robin, Mockingbird, Cardinal and other birds.

These trees grow 8-15 feet in height, sometimes reaching 20 feet. They are trouble-free, drought tolerant, can be planted in full sun to partial shade, and their berries provide beautiful winter color. Some shrubs adapted to Central Texas that produce berries in winter are *Pyracantha* (*Pyracantha coccinea*), Leatherleaf Mahonia (*Mahonia bealei*), Cotoneaster, and Nandina (*Nandina domestica*).

While you are planning this winter, think of the results next winter!

Any questions? Contact [ask.bcmga@gmail.com](mailto:ask.bcmga@gmail.com)

In the photo: The berries of the Yaupon holly tree provide food for many birds such as Cedar waxwing, Cardinal, American Robin, and Mockingbird

