

Bell County Master Gardener
Tip of the Week
By Mary Lew Quesinberry
“Possumhaw Holly”

You may have noticed a small leafless tree covered with bright red berries. This is our native Possumhaw Holly (*Ilex decidua*). There are several along north Loop 363 in Temple. They are seen along fence lines and woody areas up I35. This tree grows from the southeastern United States, throughout Texas and down to Mexico. This indistinct tree is not noticeable much of the year, until the first cold snap.

Possumhaw Holly is deciduous, losing its leaves when cold weather arrives. Surrounded by the drab colors of most wintertime foliage, its red berries make it appear like a beacon in wooded areas. My neighbor has several in his front yard in west Temple. They make a beautiful winter landscape statement. This tree is not particular about soil or growing conditions. It grows to 20 feet in height and does well in sun or as an understory tree. In the wild you will notice it near water or in low spots that collect moisture, so it will appreciate water during our dry conditions.

I have just purchased a Possumhaw Holly. Where will I plant it? In a place that when I pass by a window I will see its white trunk and red berries! What a beautiful combination of colors and an interesting addition to a landscape surrounded by the brown and tan foliage of winter. Possumhaw Holly is similar in appearance to Yaupon Holly during much of the year.

Yaupon Holly (*Ilex vomitoria*) is evergreen and the female plants of Yaupon Holly are covered in red berries all winter until the birds strip them. Other plants with winter berries that birds will feast on are wild grapes, Hackberry, *Pyracantha coccinea*, Japanese flowering Crab (*Malus floribunda*), Mahonia and Nandina.

While planning for garden color and fall planting, consider the Possumhaw Holly to add seasonal interest to your garden.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmqa@gmail.com

In the photo: Our native Possumhaw Holly makes a stunning wintertime landscape addition. This small tree loses its leaves after the first cold snap revealing red berries beloved by the Cardinal and other birds.

