



got to have it

Revive Your Winter Blues with the Abundance of Berries

by William McClenathan

I think for a few of us that have fallen in love with gardening, fall is at best a malevolent season. There are no harbingers of spring busting out of the cold earth, no songbirds heralding longer days and warmer weather, no tilling the rich soil and planting those seeds and starts we know are going to be THE plant we have always desired. Loving the warmth of summer (remember I herald from the south!), winters in Portland can be especially frustrating. But also being an eternal optimist, I have tried with all good vigor to teach myself to love the fall as well. For many years I've heard from others the how one could make their garden more interesting in winter...those words have oft fallen on my deaf ears though. Yet of late, I have decided to turn over a new leaf, full of rich fall colors no less, and search out the plants that really do bring my same spring and summer passion to fall and winter.



It's been said that the color of leaves in the fall are like the blooms of spring flowers...I am not sure about that, but I am sure that seen in the light of a different perspective, fall and winter can be full of color and truly quite interesting.

One of the many ways to accomplish this is by adding plants to your yard that produce berries...many of them edible to humans and all to wildlife.

There is an amazing cornucopia of plants that produce berries, so I want to share just a few of my favorites. You can go online or to any bookstore and literally find volumes on this subject, but here are the ones that have given me amazing pleasure lately...

First off I want to tell you about a breath taking vine that just keeps on giving... *Ampelopsis brevipedunculata 'Elegans'*, [shown above] also known as Variegated Porcelain Vine. If you have not heard of, or better yet, seen this beauty...you really must find it. Most garden centers carry it, but it never seems to get the attention I think it so richly deserves. Due to its deciduous nature, one may feel it would be uninteresting in the winter, but this is not the case. Let's start with spring though. It flushes out with stunning variegated white and green (often tinged with light pink) leaves, reminiscent of small maple leaves. This is beautifully contrasted with the arrival of new leaves of rich red. The flowers, although insignificant, are necessary to produce the true beauty of this vine, its berries. If you love berries; this plant comes replete with a colorful bag full of them. Starting out a soft shade of green, as the weather cools they act like a living thermometer, changing to light burgundy/green, then to a light purple which darkens almost to an eggplant color, and finally, miraculously ends as a true turquoise to blue. It is not unusual to have all the colors on one stem at the same time. These berries persist until late into winter even after the leaves



got to have it

Revive Your Winter Blues with the Abundance of Berries ...continued

have faded to a pastel yellow and fallen off. Simply stunning.



Next on my list is *Sambucus caerulea*. It's a large shrub, 10-20 ft., but can be kept smaller with pruning. It also makes a wonderful small tree specimen. The foliage is lovely on it's own throughout the summer, but when the pale white cluster of flowers appear in August, they are nothing more than a precursor to her true pulchritude. Pendulous clusters of teal blue, blushed with white, berries appear and persist for months. I think many people know of this plant but every year as I drive out into the countryside I am reminded of how eye catching it is. ... I consistently find myself stealing a second, almost guilty look! As though I am doing something I shouldn't but can't help myself.

Aronia melanocarpa is another widely underused plant that produces berries that not only make amazing juice, although by themselves they are bitter so sweetening is in order, but add exquisite color to any garden. This free flowing fountain type shrub is totally hardy here. It adds the beauty of berries to your garden, and it has fall color that is like the state of Vermont all rolled into one plant! The big bonus is the blooms. They are a delightful off white and lend an air of an old estate garden to your yard. Clusters of small white flowers with five petals persist on the plant for weeks. As if all that was not enough, the black Aronia berries have one of, if not the highest concentration of, antioxidants around. Not only does this gentle plant add three season interest to your garden...it can assist you in living a more healthy lifestyle!



So if you are at all like me and tend to get discouraged with fall and winter...never fear! There really are countless plants that can add interest, beauty and health to our fall and winter gardens.