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Carolinians  
Increase Their  
Knowledge of  
Gardening,  
Manage Their  
Landscape  
Investment &  
Protect the  
Environment

JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

## Deck the Landscape with Hollies

**M**ention hollies in December and most people think of the spiny evergreen that is used to deck the halls for the holidays. When it comes to the landscape, the diversity within the holly (*Ilex*) genus is neverending. These sturdy beauties can be evergreen or deciduous, small and spineless, or large and spiny. They are available in numerous shapes such as columnar, pyramidal and rounded. Homeowners use these plants for screens, hedges, mass plantings and specimen plantings.

Hollies are dioecious, meaning males produce pollen and females produce berries. Good fruit production can normally be expected if the male and female grow within 30 feet of one another. The resulting berries can be red, orange, yellow or black, depending on species. Hollies fall within the easy-to-care-for category. They prefer well-drained soil with full sun and slightly acidic soil, with the pH between 5.0 and 6.0. To maintain healthy plants, fertilize and mulch. Common insect pests of hollies include leaf miner, scale and red mites. Some of the Japanese cultivars can be very susceptible to root rot diseases.

One of my favorite evergreen hollies is *Ilex crenata* 'Helleri'. This Japanese holly survives well in many environments and makes a nice foundation plant, although it is susceptible to root rot. Another attractive choice is *Ilex cornuta* 'Carissa'. This Chinese holly has one single spine which makes for an interesting form. It is not as hardy as other varieties and seldom fruits. I also like the blue boy and blue girl combination, *Ilex x meserveae*, known as blue holly.

A good deciduous holly is the *Ilex decidua*, possumhaw holly, which has beautiful winter color and grows to a small tree. Many cultivars are available. Another great deciduous holly is the common winterberry, *Ilex verticillata*.

The true hollies are a strong suit for the JC Raulston Arboretum. It would take some serious time to study the entire collection but you would certainly walk away with great ideas for your home landscape. Many specimens are mature and robust, exhibiting all the beauty the genus is renown for showing off! **Diane Ashburn**



Winterberry  
Robert E. Lyons ©

Inside

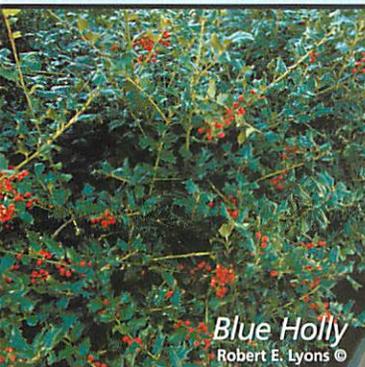
2 Know Your Plants Before You Prune Them

3 Enviro-Tip

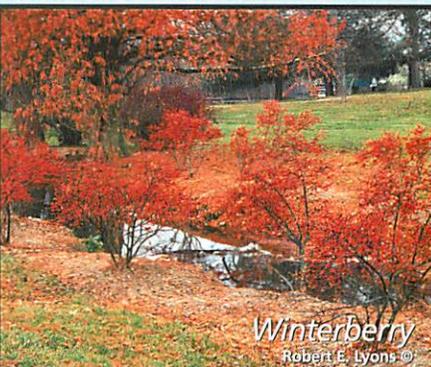
4 Garden Spot

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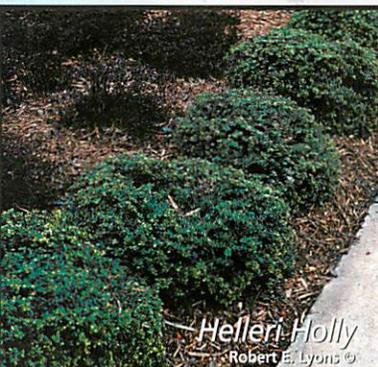
- Garden Writers Association
- International Association of Business Communicators
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Blue Holly  
Robert E. Lyons ©



Winterberry  
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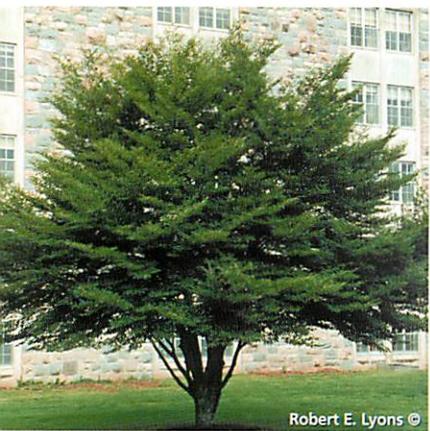


Helleri Holly  
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Paperbark Maple



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Beech



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Witchhazel

## Get to Know Your Plants Before You Prune Them

Pruning may be a little daunting to some of us, but it's necessary to maintain order and the health of our landscape shrubs and trees. Pruning is necessary for three basic reasons: to direct growth, to improve health and to increase production of flowers and fruit.

Plant selections play a factor in determining how much you will need to prune. It helps to keep this in mind when you select plants. You can reduce the need for heavy pruning when you know what you are planting and how tall and wide it will be at maturity. In other words, pick the right plant for the right place. Don't attempt to place a plant that is meant to grow large into a tiny spot unless you like to give plants frequent "haircuts." Choose shrubs for their particular characteristics and prune only to enhance this natural beauty. To maintain plants, lightly prune periodically. Prune out dead or damaged branches along with any rubbing or crossing limbs. This will allow in light and provide air circulation, both of which go a long way toward better insect and disease control.

Most shrub pruning will involve two basic pruning techniques. The first is a thinning cut which is the removal of an entire branch back to the main trunk or stem. The second is the heading back cut which simply shortens the length of a branch. Use these two pruning methods in combination.

When pruning low-hanging limbs off of trees, follow the 3-cut method. This is accomplished by first sawing the bottom of the branch 6 to 12 inches out from the trunk and about 1/3 of the way through the branch. Next, make a second cut from the top, about 3 inches further out from the first cut. As this cut is made the weight of the branch will cause it to break between the two cuts. The resulting stub can then be cut back to the collar of the branch. It is best when pruning not to remove more than 1/3 of the foliage at any one time. This way the plant is never put under any stress. If you have to stand on a ladder and use a chain saw, it is time to hire a certified arborist.

Beware of any tree service that recommends removing more than 1/3 of the crown of the tree. More is not necessarily better when it comes to pruning.

When to prune is often the hardest question to answer. A good rule of thumb is to prune after plants finish blooming but it is best to know your plants. For example, it's not enough to know something is a hydrangea: an *Hydrangea macrophylla* should be pruned after it finishes blooming in the late summer but *Hydrangea paniculata* blooms in late summer and early fall and is best pruned in the spring just before new growth begins.

Some plants prefer winter pruning, such as evergreens, fruit trees, grape vines, raspberries, blueberries and blackberries. Other plants, such as maple, birch, dogwood and elm, do not like winter or early spring pruning. They are known as "bleeders" and their wounds bleed unsightly sap if they are pruned in winter. It's best to prune these trees in summer.

Bottom line is that it pays to know more about your plants. Check out the chart for some common landscape plants and the time to prune them. Proper plant selection followed with good pruning practices will have your landscapes in top form.

Plant	Best Time to Prune
Abelia	any time
Azalea ( <i>Ericaceae</i> )	after blooming
Barberry	spring or summer
Butterfly bush ( <i>Buddleia</i> )	after bloom or late winter
Climbing roses ( <i>Rosaceae</i> )	July
Nandina	before new growth in spring
Holly ( <i>Ilex</i> )	winter
Crape Myrtle ( <i>Lagerstroemia</i> )	late winter
Dogwood ( <i>Cornus</i> )	when dormant
Forsythia ( <i>Oleaceae</i> )	after flowering

Learn more about pruning trees and shrubs at [www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/ag\\_publications.html](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/ag_publications.html) or [www.ncstate-plants.net](http://www.ncstate-plants.net).

**Donald Breedlove**

### gardentalk



"Deck the halls with boughs of holly,  
Fa la la la la,  
la la la la"

### gift idea

Give gardeners on your list a subscription to *Extension's Successful Gardener*. Visit [www.successfulgardener.org](http://www.successfulgardener.org) to order or call (919) 513-3113.



## Q&A What types of seed do birds like to eat?

**Sunflower seeds** are a favorite. Very few birds will not eat sunflower seed. Black sunflower seeds or black oil seeds are preferred by finches. Cardinals like the gray-striped seeds.

**Thistle**, also called niger or nyger, is a tiny black seed. It's more expensive than other seeds but the advantage is that squirrels don't like it. Goldfinches prefer it along with chickadees, crows, doves, juncos, siskins and sparrows.

**White millet** is the least expensive of the seeds and can be scattered on the ground on low platform feeders for doves, juncos, robins, sparrows, titmice and woodpeckers.

**Safflower** is a large seed with a white coating. It is often used as a substitute for black oil sunflower to discourage grackles, starlings and house sparrows because they do not seem to like it as much. Chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, goldfinches, house finches, grosbeaks and jays like safflower. Cardinals are particularly fond of this seed.

**Peanut pieces** are favored by greenfinches, titmice, finches, nuthatches, siskins and woodpeckers.

The best way to attract a wide variety of birds is to provide an assortment of food at a number of different feeders. Remember to include a water source to help attract birds.

**Darrell Blackwelder**

## Gift Plants

The colorful holiday tradition of giving plants brings joy every year. After all, everyone needs a little nature. Christmas cactus, poinsettia, amaryllis and paperwhite narcissus are among the most popular gift plants. Keep these staples of the season on your gift list, and consider adding the following.

*Cyclamen* is a fall-flowering bulb with pink, purple or white blooms. Cyclamen resembles dainty butterflies on decorative dark green leaves. They need cool temperatures and thrive where the average is about 50° F. An unheated room is the perfect place.

*Tulipa* can add a formal or whimsical touch to holiday settings, depending on the type. Forced pots of red and white tulips (Santa's favorite) offer a delightful alternative to the usual holiday plants. They like cool temperatures.

*Rhododendron species*, azaleas, with their red, pink, coral, ivory or white blooms add to the cheery atmosphere at Christmas. Keep the soil evenly moist to prevent bloom and leaf drop.

*Daphne odora*, winter daphne, won't bloom at Christmas, but it is a nice gift for the season. Inform the recipient that the coming cold February will brighten when this wonderfully scented evergreen blooms white, pink or purple in the landscape.

*Rosmarinus officinalis*, rosemary, is usually a small, irregular evergreen shrub. Some nurserymen shear it to create a miniature Christmas tree. **Mike Wilder**

## ENVIRO-TIP Avoid Fertilizer Runoff

Landscape plants, like all living things, need nutrients to survive. Many of the elements that are essential for a healthy landscape are already in the soil, but fertilizer often is needed to supplement these nutrients. When adding nutrients use good management practices to prevent or reduce the loss of fertilizer due to runoff.

Growers who practice good nutrient management apply fertilizer based on the plant needs without adding excessive nutrients. The primary goal is to optimize nitrogen by selecting proper rates and sources and by applying correctly at the optimum time. Too much fertilizer can damage plants, trap pollutants and impair the environment.

The following management practices will help reduce fertilizer runoff in the landscape.

- Analyze soil every 3 to 5 years to make sure fertilizer program is on target. Apply rates based on soil sample recommendation.
- Consider using a controlled-release fertilizer such as urea formaldehyde or applying nitrogen in split applications. Commercial controlled-release fertil-

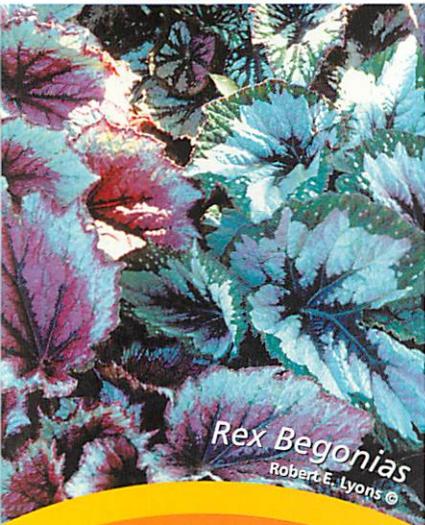
izers are usually more efficient than water soluble fertilizers in that a greater percentage of applied nutrients are utilized by the plant.

- To reduce erosion, use plant buffers or filter strips to hold soil in place and allow water to move into it rather than to run off the surface.
- Apply nitrogen at the time when the plant needs it the most. Maximum rates should be applied during the first few growing seasons of establishment, usually during late winter, early spring or the fall to generate root development and top growth. Always avoid excessive amounts which may result in too much top growth.
- Choose the best irrigation system that has the greatest efficiency. For individual plants or beds, consider using a drip system versus an overhead sprinkler system. Avoid light, frequent watering.
- Do not apply fertilizer to frozen ground or dormant turf.
- The important point to remember is to only apply the amount of fertilizer that is needed by the plant. Both the plant and the environment will be healthier. **Willie Earl Wilson**

## ENVIRO-TIP



Robert E. Lyons ©



Garden Spot

## The Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden,

located just outside of the Charlotte area in Belmont, provides its visitors a place to observe nature's beauty and all that it has to offer. Located in both North and South Carolina on a 450-acre tract of land along Lake Wylie, this paradise continues to grow into one of the premier botanical gardens in the country.

There is much to take in when visiting the garden. It has a 13,000-square-foot visitors' pavilion which houses the gift shop, as well as the numerous educational opportunities that take place year-round. The garden also has 12 sparkling fountains, four themed gardens and an outdoor grassy amphitheatre for concerts and other events.

The garden is open daily and is located at 6500 South New Hope Road in Belmont. For more information, call (704) 825-4490, or visit the Web at [www.dsbg.org](http://www.dsbg.org)

*Ben Dungan*

## Gardening in December

### Lawns

- If you did not get around to the fall fertilization of cool-season lawns such as fescue, it can still be done. The roots of cool-season grass continue to grow whenever the ground is not frozen.
- Apply broadleaf herbicides to control winter annual and perennial weeds.
- Pick up fallen leaves, limbs and other debris from lawns to prevent suffocation of the turf during winter.

### Ornamentals

- Keep your living Christmas tree outside until ready to decorate.
- Continue to plant spring bulbs until the ground is frozen. Water and mulch the bulbs.
  - Collect hardwood cuttings of your landscape plants such as forsythia, flowering quince, weigela, crape myrtle and hydrangea this month. Place the cuttings in a cold frame outside to root. If you don't have a cold frame, propagate these plants by layering.
    - Prune berry-producing plants for table arrangements over the holidays.
    - Keep poinsettias healthy by watering regularly and keeping them out of drafts.
    - Cut back and clean up frost-killed perennials.
    - Mulch and regularly water any recently planted woody ornamentals, especially evergreens.
- Use wood ashes from your fire-place or wood-burning stove on your vegetable garden.
- Plant 1-year-old asparagus crowns in the vegetable garden.
- Order fruit trees adapted to your area and designate shipping dates that avoid hard, frozen ground problems when planting. *Karen Neill*

### Edibles



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