

Make a Winterberry Wreath

Overview: The winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*) is native to North America east of the Great Plains. Unlike most hollies, winterberry is deciduous, dropping all its leaves during the fall season to unveil densely packed sprays of bright red berries along its bare branches. These berries persist well into winter and feed many different species of birds. These showy fruits also make winterberry an ideal plant for nature-made holiday decorations.



Materials:

- Local natural area with winterberry shrubs
- Hand pruners
- Wire coat hangers
- Floral tape
- Lightweight floral wire or thin aluminum wire
- Crafting or masking tape

Approximate Time to Complete: 1 hour

Location: Indoor and Outdoor

Ages: All Ages

Season: Late fall to winter

Instructions:

1. Begin by taking a fun journey with your young gardeners “on the hunt” for established winterberry plantings in an area where you are allowed to collect. Where should you look? Winterberry shrubs thrive in saturated soil conditions with full to partial sun. Winterberry is often found along the edges of lakes and ponds. Once you've found the berried shrubs, take just what you need and leave plenty of berried branches for the birds. (When working with young children, cuttings should only be taken by adults wearing protective gloves.)
2. After gathering your winterberry cuttings, prepare an area to assemble your wreaths. You will need a large table with the tools and materials needed to assemble your wreaths (hand pruners, wire coat hangers, floral tape and lightweight floral wire or thin aluminum wire).
3. Reshape the base of the coat hanger into a circular form (adults should complete this for young children). Sharp coat hanger ends should be secured and protected with crafting tape. The reshaped hanger will be the base structure for your winterberry cuttings.
4. With adult supervision, prune winterberry cuttings to similar lengths, something around 6 to 8 inches is ideal. Winterberry cuttings are apt to vary in size, so before attaching the cuttings to the base structure, be sure to prune them closely to smaller, matching lengths.

5. Using lightweight floral or aluminum wire, secure the branches around the base hanger. As each branch is secured, overlap the next branch, tightly securing each branch to the base hanger. Keep adding stems until the wreath is fully covered.
6. If you like, add decorations such as flowers, ribbons, leaves and greenery. Keep in mind that the bright and showy fruit does not need embellishment.

Aside from making great wreaths, winterberry makes a wonderful addition to the landscape, so you might want to think about planting a few shrubs for future collection. Winterberry can be grown in hardiness zones 4-9 and does best in moist, acidic soil. The plants are dioecious, meaning male or female flowers are borne on separate plants. Only the female plants produce berries, but male plants are needed for pollination and fruit-set. If you are buying plants at a nursery, be sure to purchase a suitable male cultivar to pollinate the female or fruiting cultivar you select. Include at least one male plant for every 5-10 female plants to ensure good pollination and an abundant berry crop.