

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

A berry, Merry Christmas ... mostly for the birds



Photos Cynthia Brian

Pink peppercorns from the California pepper tree add tasty, mild flavors to food.

Pistache berries are great for decorating Christmas trees if they aren't devoured by birds and squirrels first.

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Pyracantha may be the preferred winter staple of robins. Birds flock to the orange-red berries called pomes, eating so many that they seem intoxicated. Known as firethorns, pyracantha is a fast-growing plant with sharp thorns. Volunteers sprout in unusual locations thanks to the birds spreading their seeds. Keep pyracantha pruned and use branches with berries in holiday arrangements.

Viburnum shrubs and hedges add beauty to any garden. They produce pinkish-white flowers that bloom from spring until late fall, depending on the species. Birds love munching on berries ripening in winter with colors that are black, blue, purple, bright red, neon pink, and even yellow. Some species are edible by humans, but other species can be toxic. Unless you know that the viburnum you planted is edible, leave the berries to the birds.

Yew berries red flesh called arils are sweet and safe for birds. The arils provide nutrients needed by the flyers. The seed inside is deadly, and birds know to discard it. Often called the Tree of Death, all parts of the yew tree are poisonous except the arils. The highly poisonous taxane alkaloids of the yew have been developed as anti-cancer drugs.

Not for the birds...or any animal

Nandina adds multi-season interest to any garden with its nectar-rich white flowers that attract pollinators followed by clusters of green berries

that ripen to shiny bright red in late fall. The lacy foliage emerges as purple, then turns green, then changes to red and purple throughout the year. As much as I love this ornamental bush, it is important to know the berries are deadly to birds, wildlife, and domestic animals. Most birds innately avoid this plant, but the voracious eaters, cedar waxwings, are susceptible to imbibing until intoxicated. The berries contain cyanogenic glycosides that convert to hydrogen cyanide when ingested.

WARNING: *When planting berry-bearing bushes, please be cognizant that most provide wildlife forage but may be toxic, poisonous, or even deadly when consumed by humans. Never put any plant substance in your mouth unless you are certain that it is edible.*

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Birdscape your garden by growing a bird-friendly sanctuary with berry-producing florals that birds will love. Wander in a winter wonderland of wildlife and have a berry, merry Christmas ... with the birds!

Blessings to all and a ho, ho, ho!

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing. Happy Holidays!