

Maryland's Wild Acres



HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space - IS THE KEY.

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**Native Plant Profile.....Winterberry Holly
(*Ilex verticillata*)**



When most people think of hollies, they imagine the classic American holly (*Ilex opaca*) with glossy green leaves and bright red berries, both of which persist throughout the year. However, not all hollies keep their leaves! In fact, one of the best hollies for wildlife is Winterberry holly, which true its name, keeps its berries over the winter but not its leaves.

Winterberry holly has alternating leaves that turn a beautiful yellowish-green in the early Fall. This holly is shrubby and generally grows about 8-15 ft. tall. The bark is a smooth grayish-brown, and the tree puts out small white flowers in early spring. It can be found in moist, acidic soils in part sun to full shade and is very easy to grow.

Winterberry holly produces bright red berries at the end of August which stay on the tree throughout much of the winter. As the winter progresses, the constant freezing and thawing of the berries makes them more palatable to

wildlife.

The berries are consumed by species such as Eastern Bluebirds, Northern Mockingbirds, American Robins, Brown Thrashers, Cedar Waxwings, Northern Cardinals and even Wild Turkeys.

Winterberry holly is native and common throughout Maryland. It is also available through multiple nurseries.

Whether you want to attract wildlife and/or add some color to your landscape over the winter, then Winterberry holly is an excellent choice!



Interestingly enough, the 'Maryland Beauty' Winterberry cultivar won the title of the "2008 Holly of the Year" from the Holly Society of America.

Maryland Wildlife.....Northern Short-tailed Shrew (*Blarina brevicauda*)

Short-tailed shrews aren't much to look at. They have beady eyes, pointed noses and a dark grayish body with a stumpy tail. They are the largest shrews in North America, clocking in at a whopping 4.3 to 5.5 inches in length. These tiny critters require respect, as they are the only venomous mammals in the United States! The saliva of these little beasts packs a potent punch to its prey in the form of a neurotoxin. Short-tailed shrews can be deadly to animals as large as frogs and small rodents, but they are not dangerous to humans or domestic animals. Short-tailed shrews still can deliver a sharp bite if handled, though!

Short-tailed shrews have a set of 32 teeth adapted for chewing on plants, invertebrates and other small mammals. Their favorite foods are grubs. In the fall and winter, short-tailed shrews tend to hoard food, and one study found that they cache (store) as much as 87% of their food. During the winter, short-tailed shrews tend to eat 40% more food in order to maintain their body temperature. Like newborns and hibernating mammals, short-tailed shrews also possess brown adipose (fat) tissue that also aids the shrew in maintaining body heat during the cold winter months.

The short-tailed shrew is one of the most common mammals in the eastern United States and can be found in forests, fields and backyards. Short-tailed shrews are active both during the day and at night, but they spend much of their time foraging underground and in the leaf litter.

These little beasts are great at controlling insect pests as they have to eat continuously to keep up with their quick metabolism. Short-tailed shrews can sometimes be seen feasting on suet or bird seed dropped on the ground and are a great addition to your backyard!



Winterizing Nest Boxes

As Fall starts to creep in with cooler temperatures and the colorful changes of the leaves, it is important to perform some winter maintenance on nest boxes.

Once the breeding season is over, and the last brood has left the box, it is important to clean out nesting materials. Clean the box with boiling water and a brush. Make sure any drain holes at the bottom of the box are cleared of debris, and seal any areas in the box which may be leaking. Be sure to use rubber gloves while cleaning and make sure the box is dry before replacing it.

For other tips on how to 'winterize' your backyard, check out the [Fall 2008 HabiChat issue here](#).

Backyard Wildlife Fun for Kids - Pinecone Birdfeeders



In many backyards with pine trees, the pinecones have been steadily dropping.

One great way to put those pinecones to good use while also engaging children is to create pinecone bird feeders.

White pine cones make the best feeders because of their size and lack of prickles!

Materials Needed:

- Bird seed
- Butter knife or a spatula
- Pine cone
- Pie tin (or other plate)
- Smooth peanut butter or Crisco
- Yarn or string

Directions:

1. Tie string around pine cone. Leave at least 20 inches of string to hang feeder.
2. Use a butter knife or spatula to pack peanut butter into pinecone.
3. Roll pinecone in bird seed in pie tin.
4. Hang in a tree.
5. Observe and enjoy the birds that come!

Tips:

- Hang on a small or flimsy branch to discourage squirrels from using feeder
- Use a seed mix with sunflower, millet and corn to attract a diverse group of birds
- Add non-sulfured fruit pieces or crushed nuts
- Hang up in late fall and throughout the winter for the birds
- White pine cones make the best feeders because of their size and lack of prickles!



Wild Acres in Action



Recently, Jeff W. of Joppatowne made an interesting discovery in his backyard.

Jeff was enjoying the sights and sounds on a Friday afternoon when he spotted two Southern flying squirrels (*Glaucomys volans*) enjoying his bat box!

Southern flying squirrels are actually quite common in Maryland and enjoy tree cavities (or boxes!) high up in shaded areas.

Sometimes, you can hear a loud “tseep” noise from the trees in the evening.

To learn more about Southern flying squirrels and their Northern counterparts, [check out a previous HabiChat article here](#).

Many thanks to Jeff for sending in his neat find, and feel free to send me stories about your Wild Backyard!

If you enjoyed this issue of HabiChat, you might want to check out our [Online HabiChat Archive](#) and the [List of HabiChat Articles](#) by Topic.

Acknowledgements:

- Photo of Winterberry Holly in autumn, courtesy of Steven J. Baskauf, [Bioimages](#)
- Close-up photograph of Winterberry holly courtesy of Kerry Wixted
- Photograph of *Ilex verticillata* (L.) A. Gray - common winterberry, Jeff McMillian @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database
- Photograph of Winterberry holly flowers, courtesy of Nelson DeBarros @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database
- Photograph of Short-tailed shrew courtesy of [Giles Gonthier](#)
- Illustration of Black-capped Chickadee courtesy of Tracey Saxby, IAN Image Library (ian.umces.edu/imagelibrary/)
- Illustration of Pinecone feeder courtesy of [Domestic Wonder/Meagan](#)
- Photograph of Flying Squirrel courtesy of J. P. Myers
- Photograph of Wild Acres in Action by Jeff Weirauch

We want to hear from you!

Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings. Let us know how successful you are as you create wildlife habitat on your property.

Write to Me!

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