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Pretty Invasive – Stay Away from These Berries When Decorating

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

As the holidays approach, many people look to decorate using evergreens, pine cones, seed pods, berries and other natural materials. It's enjoyable collecting these items with the warmer than normal December weather we've been experiencing plus they can be composted when disposal time comes.

There are many good natural material selections but two that should definitely be avoided are Oriental bittersweet berries and multiflora rose hips. These are both invasive species and have spread throughout the northeast. Yes, the fruits are attractive and usually quite abundant but these plants can be readily spread when used in decorative arrangements. Outdoors, the birds can consume the fruits and disperse the seeds in their droppings. Indoors, spent arrangements often end up in the compost pile or tossed into brush piles where the seeds can germinate.

Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) was brought to this country as an ornamental around 1860. The woody vines grow strong and quick and the attractive orange and yellow fruits were prized for floral arrangements and wreaths. Because of the plentiful fruits, Oriental bittersweet quickly escaped cultivations and now is present pretty much throughout the eastern half of the country except for some southern states.



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Oriental bittersweet

While it does provide food for wildlife, it is an ecological threat to woodlands. As the vines wind around trees, they girdle them virtually stopping the flow of water, nutrients and carbohydrates up and down the tree trunk. Also, the vines can grow several inches in diameter and get heavier with every year of growth. During periods of high winds, heavy rains or wet snow, they can cause the tree they climbed upon to topple over. As Oriental

bittersweet envelopes the tree, its foliage shades the tree's foliage preventing essential sunlight from reaching the tree leaves. Sometimes the vines form thickets that can hinder wildlife from easily traveling through such areas.

The multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*) was also brought to this country from Asia. It was widely promoted as a 'living fence' in the 1930's and planted as a soil conservation mechanism and to confine livestock and attract wildlife. This plant tolerates a wide range of site conditions so can rapidly spread both by root sprouts and by seeds. Once source claims that mature plants can produce a million seeds per year and that the seeds can remain viable in the soil for up to 20 years. They are typically spread by birds.



Multiflora rose

Multiflora roses prefer sunny, open areas and will colonize fields, meadows and forest edges. Arching canes may be 15 feet long and plants may form dense thickets. The clusters of white to pale pink flowers bloom in late spring and do fill the air with a wonderful fragrance.

Aside from its invasive nature, the multiflora rose is a carrier for the rose rosette disease. This disease infects multiflora roses but does not seem to cause their demise. Mostly the multiflora rose serves as a reservoir for this disease and the rose leaf curl mite that spreads it to the cultivated roses in our gardens. Look for abnormal clusters of stems, bright red new growth that does not change to a normal green color and an excessive amount of soft, reddish thorns on stems that do not harden. There is no cure for this disease. If found on your plants, dig them up, bag them and discard them in the trash.

If you notice either of these two species growing on your property, it would be best to remove them. Seedlings of the multiflora rose or Oriental bittersweet that have germinated in your garden beds or hedgerows can be weeded out before they get too large. Large multiflora roses can be cut back 6 times per year for 2 or 3 years to eradicate them or herbicides can be used.

Once Oriental bittersweet starts climbing up into trees, it is very difficult to pull the vines down. Usually the stem would be cut close to the ground and an herbicide is applied to it. Sometimes several applications are necessary as they are vigorous plants.

Enjoy Nature's wonders and treasures this holiday season. Just be sure not to inadvertently cause the spread of invasive species. A listing of invasive plants in Connecticut plus information about them can be found at [CIPWG](#).

If you have questions about multiflora rose or Oriental bittersweet or on any other gardening topic, feel free to call the UCONN Home & Garden Education Center, toll-free, at (877) 486-6271, visit our web site at the [Home & Garden Education Center](#) or contact your local Cooperative Extension Center.