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Wild Berries

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yard/garden radio briefs

Midsummer brings fruits of several sizes and color to the Minnesota landscape. Wild and cultivated shrubs, trees and vines begin the tempting summer display of attractive berries. Children and a new generation of nature lovers experiment each summer with plants that are more suitably left for their ornamental qualities and bird food.

Scarlet Elder fruits in July with bright red berries following the white flowers appearing in May. The fruits look appetizing, but they are not used as human food. This elder grows in wooded locations, often in dry, sandy soil. It is a useful landscape plant in naturalistic landscape plantings. Robins are delighted when the berries ripen in early summer. The elder used for jellies and pies is the black-fruited American Elder, blooming in July in moist, sunny locations. These edible fruits will appear in late summer and early autumn.

Several honeysuckles used as landscape plants produce crops of jewel-like red or orange soft berries in July. These fruits are also fine food for birds, but are not considered edible. They are not poisonous, but neither are they tasty.

Other attractive fruiting shrubs with berries best left for wild creatures are the buckthorns, cotoneaster, aronias and all of the viburnums except the American Highbush cranberry. Nannyberry Viburnum, widely distributed over Minnesota, was a fruit used by fruit-hungry pioneers, but it is not as useful as the highly prized blueberries, wild plums or Juneberries. The black cluster of berries on Virginia Creeper or Woodbine, mistakenly used one summer by at least one Minnesota family, does not make edible jelly. Chokecherries and pin cherries afford tree fruits for jelly or juice instead.

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