

## Louisiana Native Plants for Winter Interest

Marcie Wilson, NE Region Area Horticulture Agent

The winter landscape can be bleak and drab, with long stretches of dried lawn and barren trees. Sure, we have several options for color that come in the way of cool season bedding plants like pansies, snapdragons, petunias and ornamental cabbages. But what about something different with a visual appeal that is sure to draw the eye in the dead of winter. Several native plants provide winter interest in the landscape in the form of berries, interesting bark, dried seed heads, or attractive foliage. Here are some native plant recommendations for striking winter appeal.

Oakleaf hydrangea is a native flowering deciduous shrub occurring naturally in central and southeast Louisiana. This shrub offers year-round appeal with its panicle flowers in summer, orange-burgundy foliage in the fall, and attractive bark in the winter. The retained dried flowers add visual winter interest. Oakleaf hydrangea prefers morning sun with afternoon shade, and moist well drained soil. Varieties include the Gatsby Series, Snow Queen, and Ruby Slippers.

*Yucca filamentosa*, Adam's Needle, is an evergreen succulent flowering plant native to northern and southeast Louisiana. Its sage colored dagger like leaves provide a striking contrast against the backdrop of winter. The curly threaded leaf margins and dried flower stalks and seed heads add to the appeal. One popular variety is Color Guard, with its creamy variegated leaves and compact size make it a perfect addition to rock gardens or mass plantings. *Yucca louisianensis*, Gulf Coast Yucca, is native to mostly the western parishes but is similar in growth habit. Rattlesnake-master, *Eryngium yuccifolium*, is native to much of Louisiana and is similar in form to yucca with its pale green needle like leaves and compact rosette habit. The greenish white thistle-like flower heads and pointed bracts atop the stalks are what set this species apart. With maturity, the flower globes will develop a bluish hue. The dried seed heads are favored by songbirds in the winter and will reseed readily. Purple coneflower is a desirable alternative to avoid volunteering.

Partridge berry, *Mitchella repens*, is an evergreen groundcover native to most Louisiana parishes. It is in the same family as Virginia Buttonweed, (Rubiaceae) but holds all the appeal and none of the dread. It has similar flowers to VBW but are fragrant, appearing May through October. The flowers transform to singular scarlet berries that persist through winter. The evergreen foliage is attractive, similar in appearance to creeping fig. It prefers woodland settings of part to full shade, and moist conditions. Available through most native plant nurseries.

Pink Muhly Grass, *Muhlenbergia capillaris*, is a newly name Louisiana Super Plant and for good reason. It has not only winter but year-round appeal. The flower plumes transform from pink to hay colored after first frost. The dried plumes add texture and movement to the winter landscape. This native warm season perennial grass is low maintenance, performing best in full sun to partial shade and well-drained soil. Muhly grass is native to most parishes and widely available in nurseries as an ornamental grass.



*Figure 1 Dried hydrangea flower in the winter*