



# Garden Journal

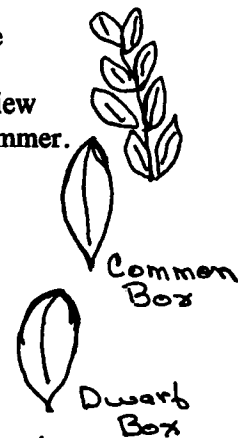
Vol. 6, No. 8

December 3, 1993

## *Holly and Ivy, Box and Bay Put in the Church on Christmas Day*

Garden lovers find much to enjoy in December, with holiday preparations being made throughout Williamsburg. Even before the decorations are added, the gardens are gay with evergreens. Broad-leaved evergreens thrive here in Tidewater, and it might be helpful to review some of them now that they are not competing with the more showy flowers of spring and summer.

We have three miles of boxwood hedges in the historic area, making it one of our most conspicuous shrubs. In fact, a Williamsburg matron accused landscape architect Arthur Shurcleff of having "boxwood on the brain" in his restored and redesigned gardens. There are two kinds of box here, the small round-leaved dwarf box, and the larger common or tree box, which has a more pointed leaf. Both are of European origin, but sometimes visitors might refer to dwarf as "English" and common as "American." If you have trouble distinguishing boxwood from small-leaved hollies, remember the leaves of box grow opposite each other on the stem, and their margins are smooth. Holly leaves are arranged alternately down the stem, and are notched.



American holly must have delighted the English, already familiar with their own holly. Both American and English holly grow in the Blaikley-Durfey garden. These are the familiar Christmas hollies. Yaupon holly is one of the most widely used plants in the historic area. It substitutes for the formally clipped boxwood hedges; it is clipped as topiary; and it grows as a free-standing shrub or small tree. All of these forms grow at the Red Lion. The cylindrical "Twelve Apostles" accenting the ballroom gardens are yaupon holly. It also edges the oval beds in front of the Palace. Plants which are not clipped regularly bear attractive red berries. Indians and colonists made tea from the leaves. In strong concentrations this has an emetic quality, which explains the Latin name Linnaeus assigned, *Ilex vomitoria*.

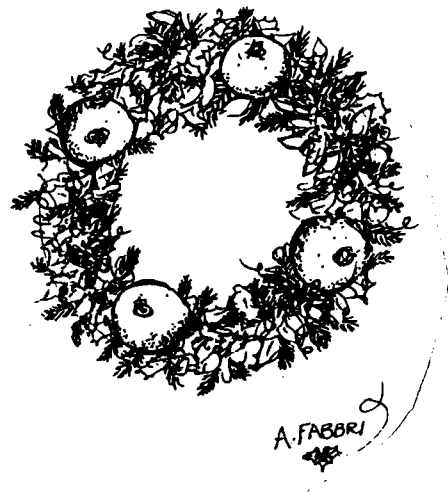
The whorled berries of the winterberry, a deciduous holly, are a wonderful ornament to a winter garden. Several grow along the west wall in the Palace gardens, near the wine cellar. Another deciduous native holly, possumhaw, grows as a small tree in the Custis-Maupin garden.



English yew grows in the corner of Bruton churchyard by the Wythe house wall. Yew, a symbol of immortality, was traditionally planted in church yards and cemeteries. It was the wood used by archers for their bows. Cedar of Lebanon grows near the yew, with interesting cones similar to those of the deodar cedar. There are some fine deodars by the entrance to the Williamsburg Inn. Both Deodar and Cedar of Lebanon are exotic (imported) species.

Our native redcedar is not really a cedar, but a juniper. The blue berries and distinctive aroma make this tree easy to identify. Redcedars are common in the historic area. Many of the decorations feature redcedar. It was used for shingles and fences, and later furnished the wood for pencils. The blue berries of redcedar are used to flavor gin, look for them on the label of a gin bottle. It is also a likely tree to look for cedar waxwings, and many of our visitors love to learn about our native birds.

Pomegranates used in our Christmas decorations are not only long-lasting and beautiful, but the source of both Hebrew and Christian legends. The Old Testament contains a number of references to the pomegranate; some of the most evocative and erotic descriptions may be found in the Song of Songs. The Hebrews held the pomegranate in great esteem as one of the characteristic plants of the land of Israel; "A land of wheat and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates." Deut. 8:8 Pomegranates (rimmonim), ornamented the robes of the High Priest and were also employed in the decorations of Solomon's Temple. Originally, the ornaments that topped the rollers of the Scrolls of the Law were silver or gold pomegranates, and to this day these elements are called rimmonim whether they resemble pomegranates or not. Martha Katz-Hyman showed us slides of these rimmonim in our recent classes on Judaism. The many-seeded fruit was a symbol of the Torah with its 613 precepts, and even the most worthless of men was "as full of good deeds as is the pomegranate full of seeds."



Christian symbolism drew upon the Hebraic tradition as well as pagan mythology. The pomegranate is the symbol of Christ's Resurrection, a symbol of fertility, and because of the countless seeds found within a single fruit, a symbol of the inner unity of the Church.

The name pomegranate derives from the Latin *Pomum* (apple) and *granatus* (having many seeds). The medicinal virtues of pomegranate have been known since Antiquity. It is a vermifuge, used in the removal of tapeworm. The pulp-coated seeds are used in flavoring certain syrups, of which the best-known is grenadine. Pomegranate rind, rich in tannin was often used to manufacture a red dye used in the tanning of morocco leather, and an excellent ink was once extracted from the pericarp of the fruits.

Pomegranate is easily cultivated in climates with mild winters. It can tolerate temperatures as low as 15 degrees F, if protected from strong wind. The walled garden at the Palace provides an ideal habitat for our pomegranates. It thrives in any type of soil, even tolerating that near the sea, and it does not mind drought. It is native to an area extending from Iran to northwestern India.

Thanks to Arlene Fabbri for her original drawings. She says it reminds her of decorating the blackboards when she was in school. Enjoy sharing our beautifully gift-wrapped historic area with all of our visitors and fellow employees.

*Cyndia Long*

References: *Flowers A Guide for Your Garden*, Pizzetti and Cocker

