HOLIDAY’S BOUNTY OF BERRYING, LUSH BRANCHES

When it comes to holiday décor, trimmings matter a lot. There are many berries, branches and greens to accent arrangements for extra festivity. We talked to growers and wholesalers throughout the U.S. about some of their favorite products, along with care and handling tips to ensure your designs look merry and bright.

Ilex
Commonly called Winterberry, Ilex has small holly-like serrated leaves. “It’s a relatively low maintenance product that should last at least two to three weeks,” said Martin Meskers, owner of Oregon Flowers in Aurora, Ore. “Then the berries start to dry up.” To prevent Ilex from shriveling, recut it and place it in water, then store it at 36F to 40F, he said.

While Ilex is low maintenance for the buyers, it’s anything but for the growers — and that’s why it’s more expensive than some of the other holiday greens. Giving the bright berries their signature bare branches is a multi-step process — see how it happens at Oregon Roses, on youtube.com/SAFVision.

Snowberry
Also known as Waxberry, Snowberry is a welcome addition in any yuletide arrangement as “its beautiful berries mimic snowballs,” said Toni Andrade, a salesperson with Mayesh Wholesale Florists in Los Angeles.

Andrade recommends stripping the stems of all foliage upon arrival: It looks better without it, plus, the foliage tends to dry out well before the “snowballs” do. Store in a fresh flower food solution, between 40F to 45F, and keep it out of direct sunlight and drafty areas. Make sure customers know snowberries are poisonous to humans and should not be ingested.

Carolina Sapphire
This bluish-gray foliage “brings a Southern flair to Christmas,” said Jana Register of FernTrust in Seville, Fla. To maximize life, keep it boxed, in its packaging and store in a cooler at 36F to 42F. “Transpiration continues to occur after it’s cut, so keeping it in a closed box slows the process.” Carolina Sapphire can be stored for weeks in this fashion.

Used in designs, Carolina Sapphire is like all other cuts: it does best in fresh flower food solution. In foam designs, “a light misting of water will keep it looking great for weeks for the customer’s holiday enjoyment.”

Port Orford Cedar
Commonly known as PO Cedar, this coniferous green commonly appears in wreaths and garlands.

Closed box storage for the month of December is fine, but “keep it cold,” (34F to 36F) said Scott Jewett, a sales manager with Continental Floral Greens in San Antonio. “If not chilled, it can generate its own heat and turn brown or black as it burns itself up.” Misting it every few days will prolong its shelf life — but only if the product’s in a cold environment, Jewett said. “Otherwise moisture can cause mold.” Jewett uses a garden hose to wet bulk product; a spray bottle works on wreaths and garlands.

If you use PO Cedar in store displays, “think of direct sunlight and heaters as the enemies,” he said. If your December temperatures tend to be in the 30s or lower, your shop door and awning are prime places to show it off.

Make sure you understand PO Cedar’s sensitivity to heat: if you stack the coils, they’ll generate heat and brown. To avoid the green’s untimely demise, store PO Cedar on a pallet to allow ventilation underneath them. “Do whatever engineering you want — be it a 2-by-4 bridging piles of bricks — just make sure it’s elevated,” Jewett said.

Katie Hendrick

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