

What's That Plant With the Red Berries?

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

For years I learned to brace myself when I saw someone approaching me with a plastic bag in their hand. I know that it contained a plant or a bug that they wanted identified or diagnosed (is this an insect or a disease?) I have never minded doing this, after all it's a very big part of my job. But times and technology have changed. Now I notice people approaching me and they are getting their phone out and opening up the photos app to show me a picture of something and it usually isn't a photo of their grandchildren or their dog! In recent weeks the photos seem to have all been of a shrub with red berries and more recently bright yellow needles on pine trees.

Bright yellow needles on pine trees will certainly grab your attention but aren't anything to get concerned about. Pine trees, like other evergreens, do not hold on to those needles (leaves) forever. In most species we expect that they will only stay on the tree for no more than three or four years. As new foliage develops each year, old needles, the ones furthest back on the branch, become shaded and eventually cease producing enough food, through photosynthesis, to justify the energy being spent to keep them alive. So the tree sheds them.

Some years this is a gradual process, but this year many of the pine trees are shedding them all at once. They turn bright yellow and fall off the tree. The process is called natural needle drop. You can wait until they've all fallen off and then rake them up and use them for mulch, they make very good mulch! When you want to get concerned is when all the needles on a pine tree branch, clear out to the end of the branch, turn brown and don't fall off. When this happens, give me a call!

As for the shrub with bright red berries, this one is a real problem. Amur honeysuckle was sold for years as a landscape and wildlife plant. Beautiful white flowers in the spring, bright red berries that the birds really like in the fall and very tough with few insect or disease problems. Unfortunately, the birds really like it. They feed on the berries and then plant the seeds everywhere. Amur, or shrub, honeysuckle has become so invasive that in some woodland areas from here east in the state, it is crowding out all the other plants on the forest floor and making it impossible for natural reproduction of our native hardwoods. DO NOT plant this shrub and if you have it growing on your property, cut it down and kill the stump!

As I said, I don't mind identifying those photos. But sometimes well meaning individuals make my job very challenging. So to help me help you, here's some things to keep in mind. I need a photo that is in focus. If it's blurry on your phone, it's going to be blurry on my computer! With insects you may not be able to get close enough so just bring the insect in to me. On plants, send me a photo of the entire plant so I can see the setting. Then a close up of some of the leaves. You may see a pretty tree with yellow or red leaves. That's not enough detail for me to always identify it. Are the leaves on the stem opposite or alternate, simple or compound, smooth edged or tooth edged? I need these details.

Once you have your photos, email them to me at cotte@ksu.edu, BUT when you get ready to send, your phone may ask you what size image to send. ALWAYS send me the actual size. If you send me a reduced size file I lose the ability to blow it up to see details, thereby losing the ability to give you an identification. If all else fails, there's also the tried and true technique, of just bringing me an actual sample from the plant to my office at 119 East 9th Street in Junction City.