



Common Name: CHRISTMAS-BERRY

Scientific Name: *Lycium carolinianum* Walter

Other Commonly Used Names: Carolina wolfberry

Previously Used Scientific Names: none

Family: Solanaceae (tomato)

Rarity Ranks: G4/S1

State Legal Status: Special Concern

Federal Legal Status: none

Federal Wetland Status: FACW

Description: **Shrub** to 10 feet (3 meters) tall, with clambering branches bearing short, buff-colored, thorn-tipped **twigs**. **Leaves** up to 1 inch (2.5 cm) long, narrow at the base and slightly wider at the tips, alternate, fleshy, often in clusters, strong-smelling when crushed. **Flowers** up to ½ inch (1.2 cm) across, with 4 - 5 spreading lobes; blue, lavender, or white, with purple streaks; flower stalk up to 1 inch long. **Fruit** a berry, ⅝ inch (0.8 - 1.5 cm) long, oval, red, with 4 sepals.

Similar Species: Flowers, fruits, and thorn-tipped twigs of Christmasberry are distinctive. False-willow (*Baccharis angustifolia*) has needle-like leaves not in clusters; tan, brittle, upright stems (new growth is green); and downy, white flower heads that are showy in the fall. Beach elder (*Iva imbricata*) has fleshy leaves up to ½ inch (1.2 cm) wide; primarily a dune shrub, it rarely gets taller than 2 feet (60 cm).

Related Rare Species: None in Georgia.

Habitat: Coastal sand spits, shell mounds, edges of salt marshes.

Life History: Christmas-berry flowers are pollinated by bees. Its berries are an important wildlife food for many species, including some species of mammals (marsh rice rat, *Oryzomys palustris*), moths (*Loxostege floridalis*), and birds, such as whooping cranes (*Grus americana*), which eat large quantities of these berries as a winter food on crane refuges in Texas.

Survey Recommendations: Surveys are best conducted during flowering (September–October) and fruiting (November–December).

Range: Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and West Indies.

Threats: Clearing and destruction of habitat by coastal developers.

Georgia Conservation Status: One population is known at Cumberland Island National Seashore.

Conservation and Management Recommendations: Protect salt marshes, dunes, and other coastal communities from development.

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L. Chafin, May 2007: original account

K. Owers, Feb. 2010: added pictures

CHRISTMAS-BERRY
Lycium carolinianum



J.C. Putnam H.

fruit flower bud flower