

## The Sex Life of the Bittersweet

By Ruth Delhay

When I was in the fourth grade, Miss Wilson, our teacher brought a small container of dry bittersweet and placed it on her desk. I was immediately fascinated with it since I had never seen any before. Through the years, I always thought that someday I would like to have some around, perhaps even grow some for myself. Years later when I was visiting my brother in Omaha, we stopped at a roadside market and there to my surprise, there were a few stems of bittersweet for sale. I told my brother that I had wanted some for years so he bought me a few stems. I intended to use it as a decorative item.

Then many years later when my husband and I had a home with a yard big enough to have part of the yard fenced, I was determined to get some bittersweet to plant near the fence; so I went to Farmers Market and found, to my surprise a display of bittersweet. Of course I bought three plants hoping they would produce some berries for after all I had waited many years! The first year the plants grew quite well but produced no berries. The next year I went to Farmers Market again and found the vendor with the bittersweet. I told him that the plants I had purchased the year before grew well but did not produce any berries. He asked me if I had male or female plants. Well, good night, how would I be able to tell and anyhow, we did not discuss sex!! He told me if I would bring some leaves from the plants his wife could identify them but he did not know. I said "OKAY". So next time I went to Farmers Market and located the vendor he said "I have some news for you." Of course I was interested to know if my plants were girls or boys! Mr. Vendor said his wife told him to sell me plants from the other sex – but he did not tell me what I already had. I planted the new stems and hoped!

The next summer all the plants had grown well and produced little pods! Hallelujah! I was excited. They grew all summer and by the end of the summer and by the end of summer there were quite a few stems with pods of berries. I cut some very carefully and took them inside. If you take them inside while they are cool, the pods will open as they get warm to reveal the little berries. Let me tell you that after three summers I was really excited. The shell just folds back and there are the berries.

Now I know that in many parts of the country the bittersweet is considered to be a noxious plant, but for me it was delightful to see the results of all the years I had been determined.

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