

Our Red Tipped Chinese Photinia

Below you will see images of an unexpected tree that appeared like a gratuitous offering at our home. The Red Tipped Photinia (*Photinia serrulata*) is an evergreen tree that originated in China or Taiwan. It was a popular hedging plant in the mid and late 20th century, particularly in the eastern states in part due to its unique modes of expression during the year. Red Tips may have recently come to disfavor because they respond poorly to being crowded by other Red Tips or competition from larger trees or vines. Lack of air circulation restricts growth and encourages a leaf spot disease that can eventually kill the plant. Its defining bright red color arises every spring on new growth, but requires winter pruning to encourage that vibrant color.

We had thought our red tipped Photinia was the same as the *Photinia x fraseri*, a very different shrub available in North Carolina garden centers. Those have an expected height of only six feet and have small clusters of flowers. By contrast, we found ours to be a *Photinia serrulata*, boasting 25 feet of height, 12 feet of width, and aggressive 6-inch clusters. In April, walking around Durham we occasionally see the same large clusters from likely predecessors of our tree, but few instances of the full tree.

We certainly did not plant it. Perhaps our 25-foot plant germinated from seeds dropped by birds around 20 years ago. As it matured we discovered its remarkable color and shape-shifting abilities. In the fall it has dark green foliage with some downward pointed dark red leaves. Then with the winter solstice bright red berries signal its rebirth. In February, reddish buds emerge bordered by light green guard leaves. By April, these develop into vibrant six-inch clusters of white flowers. Twenty feet from the plant these flowers fill the air with a sweet, strong verdant scent. The clusters fade and are gone by the beginning of May. The Red Point then stands quietly until start of its dancing displays in December.

Joel and Chrissy Huber

Our Red Point Chinese Photinia



Spring flowers 2016



Spring flowers 2018



Winter Berries 2019



Spring flowers 2021

Growth cycle



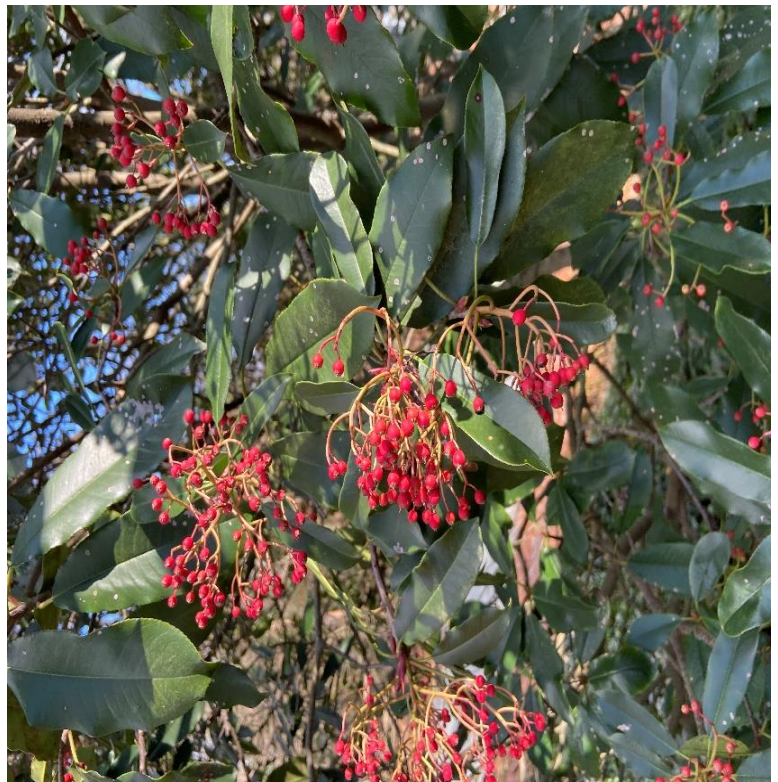
January buds



February growth



April flower clusters



December berries

Red Point Photinia in April— A Tapestry of Color and Form



