**NATIVE PLANTS**  
*for the Garden*

**BERBERIS ‘GOLDEN ABUNDANCE’**

by John Whittlesey

In mid winter plants in the garden are fairly quiet – many have lost their leaves and are dormant, while the evergreens are.... well... just that - evergreen, maintaining their consistent appearance month after month. In my garden though, the one evergreen shrub that has enough subtle changes in its appearance to capture my attention as I drive up the gravel drive is Berberis ‘Golden Abundance’.

The lustrous, rich green leaves, some suffused with shades of red, maroon and burgundy, glisten in the light filtering through the stand of blue oaks. The play of light reflecting off the varying colors in the foliage gives the plant depth and interest this time of year when all else seems fairly static. The shiny leaves are large, and pinnately divided into holly-like leaflets with the scalloped edges armed with sharp points. While the focus is directed toward the glossy foliage, in early January the flower buds are slowly developing in the apex of the stems. In February/March these will open into dense clusters of showy, rich yellow flowers. The cultivar ‘Golden Abundance’ is aptly named because of the prolific quantities of flowers produced. It is a stunning plant in full bloom.

Not only is it a beautiful plant in the landscape but it is a highly desirable plant for pollinators. Blooming early in the season when there is often little else in bloom, a variety of native bees, including bumblebees, along with a variety of flies and butterflies are found in the company of its flowers. When the sun is shining, a grouping of these plants in a garden in Stonyford is extremely active with numerous pollinators obtaining nectar and pollen.

The fruits resulting from pollination are also attractive. The size of grapes they are deep blue purple with a lightly applied powdery sheen. The fruits reportedly are eaten by birds, though in my experience I’ve never seen a bird eating them.
‘Golden Abundance’ is a chance seedling that was selected by Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden in the early 70’s, with at least one of the parents being the most commonly grown berberis in gardens, the Oregon grape, Berberis aquifolium. ‘Golden Abundance’ is a robust plant which can grow to 8’ tall and wide, but in situations with lean soils and grown on the dry side, 5’-6’ is a reasonable size to expect. In our climate with long hot summers, it is best grown in light shade under tall trees such as oaks or positioned where it has relief from the late afternoon sun.

The Berberis (once classified as Mahonias) are rugged, adaptable shrubs in the garden. While they thrive best in partial shade they can grow in fairly sunny positions. The water regime can vary from regular garden irrigation to very little water. The berberis planted in my garden under large blue oaks, received no water during what was a fairly hot summer in 2013 and looked perfectly fine through the year. If grown in a sunnier position some watering would have been needed to maintain an attractive appearance.

They tend to be colonizers, with new woody stems growing from the base. To keep plants tidy and less woody, remove the oldest stems down to the ground as needed. Their colonizing habit makes them suitable for large informal and impenetrable hedges.

The larger growing berberis such as B. aquifolium and ‘Golden Abundance’ are natural companions to any native or non native shrub border. They are easily combined with manzanitas, toyon, ceanothus, tassel bush, redbud and ribes. And for those of us who garden in fire prone landscapes, the berberis are good choices, the thick leathery leaves do not burn readily.