What are those perfectly puffy, pearl-sized pillows pendulously perched on that pretty shrub?

In late fall and early winter, the snowberry plant (*Symphoricarpos albus*) sets its fruits, which look like tiny snowballs.

Two species of this genus of the honeysuckle family are found in our local countryside, but the taller shrub form can be the more stunning species in your landscape. The pinkish-white, bell-shaped flowers of this plant are quite beautiful, but because of their small size, they are not the main attraction of this plant.

Snowberry is a deciduous shrub (loses its leaves in the winter) that can reach a mature height anywhere from 2 to 6 feet. Even though snowberry can reproduce by seed, most new plants arise from rhizomes and can colonize into a thicket.

A ground-hugging version of snowberry (*Symphoricarpos mollis*) is called “creeping” or “trailing” snowberry and is found along many of our local trails, especially around Shasta and Whiskeytown lakes.

Snowberry naturally occurs in the northern and western United States and in Canada at elevations
from sea level to 4,000 feet. In nature, snowberry is often found in foothill woodlands and forested areas. In a home landscaped setting, snowberry likes to be protected from hot, direct sunlight and can be a nice understory plant. It is drought tolerant and in a garden setting it would need occasional water to survive Redding’s summer heat. Many soil types are tolerated by snowberry, including Redding’s heavy clay soils.

Don’t mistake the berry-sized fruit of snowberry to be albino blueberries. Even though birds, small mammals, deer, and cattle may feed upon this plant, it is not edible for humans. Native American cultures considered these berries to be poisonous, but one northwestern group used one or two berries to settle the stomach after too much fatty food (don’t try this at home). The snowberry plant was also used for other medicinal purposes, as soap, and as the wood for arrow shafts.

Snowberry can be difficult to find at your local nursery, but it is usually available at the spring and fall plant sales held at Shasta College by the California Native Plant Society. As winter comes and snowberry plants are showing off their little white orbs, members of CNPS are busy propagating plants for the coming year.