Introduction

A hybrid between Ilex aquifolium and Ilex cornuta, Nellie R. Stevens Holly has kept the best traits of both parents, with lustrous, dark green leaves and abundant fruit production. Leaves are among the darkest of any plant. Vigorous and fast-growing, this Holly quickly grows into an attractive, broad pyramidal-shaped evergreen, 20 to 30 feet high and 10 to 12 feet wide. It will need a male Holly nearby to ensure pollination and production of the vivid red berries.

Chinese Holly, Ilex cornuta will flower at the proper time and may be used for this purpose.

General Information

Scientific name: Ilex x
Pronunciation: EYE-lecks
Common name(s): ‘Nellie R. Stevens’ Holly
Family: Aquifoliaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 6A through 9B (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Invasive potential: little invasive potential
Uses: sidewalk cutout (tree pit); parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; street without sidewalk; screen; hedge; urban tolerant; highway median; container or planter; Christmas tree
Availability: not native to North America

Figure 1. Middle-aged Ilex x ‘Nellie R. Stevens’: ‘Nellie R. Stevens’ Holly
Credits: Ed Gilman

Figure 2. Range
**Description**

- **Height:** 20 to 30 feet
- **Spread:** 10 to 15 feet
- **Crown uniformity:** symmetrical
- **Crown shape:** pyramidal, oval, upright/erect
- **Crown density:** dense
- **Growth rate:** moderate
- **Texture:** medium

**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)
- **Leaf type:** simple
- **Leaf margin:** entire, pectinate, spiny
- **Leaf shape:** oblong
- **Leaf venation:** brachidodrome, pinnate
- **Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen
- **Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches
- **Leaf color:** green
- **Fall color:** no color change
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

- **Flower color:** white/cream/gray
- **Flower characteristics:** not showy

**Fruit**

- **Fruit shape:** round
- **Fruit length:** less than .5 inch
- **Fruit covering:** fleshy
- **Fruit color:** red
- **Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**

- **Trunk/bark/branches:** branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns
- **Pruning requirement:** little required
- **Breakage:** resistant
- **Current year twig color:** green
- **Current year twig thickness:** medium
- **Wood specific gravity:** unknown

**Culture**

- **Light requirement:** full sun, partial sun or partial shade
- **Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; acidic; slightly alkaline; well-drained; extended flooding
- **Drought tolerance:** high
- **Aerosol salt tolerance:** unknown

**Other**

- **Roots:** not a problem
- **Winter interest:** no
- **Outstanding tree:** no
- **Ozone sensitivity:** unknown
- **Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** resistant
- **Pest resistance:** free of serious pests and diseases

**Use and Management**

Nellie R. Stevens Holly is one of the best Hollies for the warmer regions of the country, and is ideally-suited for use as a screen or border. It maintains a nice, uniform shape without pruning. It is now becoming widely available and is one of the best plants for making a screen due to its very dense, symmetrical habit. Locate it where it will have enough space to spread since trees become wide at the base. Lower branches can be removed to create a clear trunk for planting along a walk or near a patio, but the tree really shines as a specimen or screen allowed to develop with all branches intact to the ground. Nursery operators grow the tree either as a multi-stemmed clump or with one central leader. Multi-stemmed trees may not hold up in ice storms as well as those with a central leader. Main branches on single-leadered trees are usually well-secured to the trunk, making the tree sturdy and a permanent fixture for almost any landscape.

Nellie R. Stevens Holly should be grown in full sun or partial shade on well-drained, slightly acid soil. Plants are drought-resistant once established.

Propagation is by cuttings or grafting.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern, perhaps scale on occasion.