**Ilex glabra** Inkberry, Gallberry

Edward F. Gilman

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**Introduction**

This upright, clump-forming, evergreen shrub is valued for its foliage and fruits. The lustrous, dark green leaves may have a few obtuse teeth toward the leaf apex or they may have entire margins. They are obovate to oblanceolate in shape and may reach a length of 3/4 to 2 inches. Gallberry becomes somewhat open with age and often loses its small lower branches. Female plants have berry-like, black drupes that occur from September to May of the following year. These 6- to 8-foot-tall plants are especially valuable to birds for their persistent fruits and branch structures. The flowers of *Ilex glabra* appear in May, and the staminate and pistillate flowers occur on separate plants. The female flowers are solitary, and the male flowers are borne on a stalk consisting of 3 or more flowers. Both sexes of flowers have creamy white petals and are inconspicuous.

**General Information**

- **Scientific name:** *Ilex glabra*
- **Pronunciation:** EYE-lecks GLAY-bruh
- **Common name(s):** inkberry, gallberry
- **Family:** Aquifoliaceae
- **Plant type:** shrub
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 5 through 10A (Fig. 1)
- **Planting month for zone 7:** year round
- **Planting month for zone 8:** year round
- **Planting month for zone 9:** year round
- **Planting month for zone 10:** year round
- **Origin:** native to Florida
- **Uses:** reclamation plant; specimen; screen; foundation; mass planting
- **Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

**Description**

- **Height:** 6 to 8 feet
- **Spread:** 8 to 10 feet
- **Plant habit:** vase shape; oval
- **Plant density:** open
- **Growth rate:** slow
- **Texture:** medium

**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** alternate
- **Leaf type:** simple

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Leaf margin: serrate
Leaf shape: obovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

**Flower**
Flower color: white
Flower characteristic: spring flowering

**Fruit**
Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: fleshy
Fruit color: black
Fruit characteristic: attracts birds; showy

**Trunk and Branches**
Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; not particularly showy
Current year stem/twig color: green
Current year stem/twig thickness: thin

**Culture**
Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
Soil tolerances: extended flooding; acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

**Other**
Roots: sprouts from roots or lower trunk
Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

**Use and Management**
Gallberry is excellent when used in mass plantings and as naturalizing material. It has been utilized as a hedge, foundation plant and accent plant. It makes a poor hedge because it thins toward the bottom.

*Ilex glabra* prefers a full sun to partial shade location in the landscape and moist, acidic soils; high-pH soils should be avoided. Older plants may be renewed by heavy pruning.

Cultivars include ‘Compacta’, dwarf female clone, tighter branching and foliage than species, grows 4 to 6 feet high, becomes leggy at base; ‘Georgia Wine’, turns burgundy during the winter; ‘Ivory Queen’ and ‘Leucocarpa’, white fruited forms, grow 6 to 8 feet high; ‘Nigra’, purplish foliage in winter; ‘Nordic’, compact rounded form, grows 3 to 4 feet tall, cold hardy, needs pruning to keep it dense; ‘Shamrock’, compact form, slower growing then species, leaves smaller and flat; ‘Steed’, compact form; ‘Squat’, compact form.

Propagate the gallberry by seed, layering, cuttings, and grafting.

**Pests and Diseases**
No pests or diseases are of major concern. Leaf spot, scales, and spittle bugs have been observed on this plant.